DO LEARNERS' BELIEFS MATTER?

**SELF-EFFICACY AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT AMONG
IRANIAN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

by

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ABSTRACT

Through interviews with eight Iranian participants, this Major Research Paper explores second language adult learners' beliefs about their abilities in performing English language tasks. Primary research questions include: (i) Do learners' self-efficacy or beliefs about their competency in acquiring a second language affect their language learning performance? (ii) Does gender impact the level of self-efficacy a second language learner might hold? With respect to the first research question the findings demonstrate that unlike the female participants, the male participants' self-efficacy positively correlates with their second language acquisition. In terms of the second research question, the results of the study show that gender isn't deemed influential in the formation of self-efficacy among second language learners.

Key Words: Self-Efficacy • Second Language Acquisition • Gender • Affect • Learners' Beliefs

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

"Self-efficacy is concerned with judgments about how well one can organize and execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations containing many ambiguous, unpredictable, and often stressful elements."

Bandura and Schunk, 1981, p.587

1. INTRODUCTION

In explaining one's ability to learn a new language, one must not only investigate the learner's cognitive variables but also *affective* variables. Through the lens of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), scholars affirm how affective variables contribute more to the result of second language learning than do aptitude, intelligence, the methodology used to teach in the classroom, or the time spent learning the language (Kennedy *et al.* 2000). There is a diverse set of variables considered as the affective side of second language learning, variables such as attitudes, motivation, interest, *learners' beliefs*, needs, expectations, and prior experiences (McKenna *et al*., 1995, cited in Rahimi and Abedini ,2009, p.15). Learners' preconceived beliefs about language learning would likely affect the way they learn a second language. Thus, learners' beliefs in their capabilities affect performance tremendously and can predict performance better than their real ability (Bandura, 1997; Yang, 1999).

Building on learners' beliefs, several scholars have defined self-efficacy as one of the components of learner beliefs (Bernhardt 1997, Bandura, 1984). Self-efficacy refers to "personal judgments of performance capabilities in a given domain of activities" (Schunk, 1985, p. 208, cited in Yang, 1999, p.517). Bandura (1997) states that self-efficacy refers to "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3).

1

The importance of self-efficacy becomes highly tangible when observing how it affects the learner's behaviour. Learning English as a second language (ESL) can be a significant challenge for immigrants who come to Canada. Therefore upon arrival they encounter linguistic difficulties, and since the majority of immigrants' mother tongue is not English, Raoofi *et al.,*(2012) discuss how given the significant role of self-efficacy, it seems relevant to do a comprehensive review on the role of self-efficacy in learning a second language. According to Bandura (1986) self-efficacy beliefs are responsible for the knowledge learners seek and for the outcomes they expect, and thus it determines the choices learners make. Moreover, self-efficacy beliefs are a determiner of how much effort learners will put into an activity and how long they will stand their ground in achieving a task (Bandura, 1986).

According to Rahimi and Abedini (2009), the concept of self-efficacy in relation to second language achievement is a relatively recent research topic and there have been few studies that demonstrate the correlation between the two variables. Nevertheless, scholars interested in this domain have come up with findings that indicate a positive correlation between self-efficacy and achievement (Rahimi and Abedini, 2009; Magogwe and Oliver, 2007; Bandura, 1997).

Raoofi *et al*. (2012) note that most studies regarding self-efficacy and SLA examine the relationship between self-efficacy and performance in reading and listening skills. However fewer studies have investigated the relationship between self-efficacy and performance in writing and speaking. Thus, this study investigates the contribution of self-efficacy on the learners' second language success and achievement in the two productive skills of speaking and writing. This paper argues that there is a positive

correlation between second language learners' self-efficacy and their English language achievement, due to the influence that a learners' feelings of competence have on their language performance. This study will look into the idea that Iranian men may appear to have higher self-efficacy beliefs and that Iranian women may have lower self-efficacy with regard to second language achievement.

While culture may influence the determination of academic self-efficacy, this paper further postulates that gender plays a role in holding high or low self-efficacy beliefs among second language learners. Acknowledging that there's a gap in this study domain with respect to gender, this study aims to demonstrate gender differences when discussing self-efficacy beliefs, and the consequential variance in language performance between male and female learners. A study of individuals with a distinct ethnic and cultural background in particular allows for a more in-depth look at the dynamics of this relationship within the bounds of one ethnic group.

The following section of this paper covers work on gender, self-efficacy and second language acquisition. Through theories of second language achievement, this segment elaborates on the significance of self-efficacy and attribution theories. Section three describes the research methodology of this study as it pursues a qualitative approach. It discusses the recruitment procedure, the instruments utilized, the coding of the data gathered and lastly the limitations encountered in the study. Section four expands on the results obtained after the preliminary research was conducted. To conclude, the fifth section outlines the research findings that both support and run contrary to this

study's main hypotheses, and explores possible explanations for these outcomes. The last section of the paper discusses areas for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will cover literature on self-efficacy and second language achievement. It discusses the cognitive and socio-cognitive theories of second language acquisition. By concentrating on affective variables described within the socio-cognitive theories, this study attempts to explore how learners' beliefs and specifically how self-efficacy beliefs affect second language acquisition. Furthermore, the literature discusses how learners' attributions influence their self-efficacy and therefore their second language achievement. With respect to socio-cultural factors, this study also focuses on gender and the literature available on whether it has an influence on self-efficacy and second language achievement.

2.1 Defining Second Language Acquisition

A search in contemporary dictionaries depict learning as acquiring knowledge of a subject or a skill through study, experience, or instruction (Archibald and O'Grady, 2009). Very quickly the concept of learning becomes complex when discussing learning a second language.

Some second language researchers (Archibald and O'Grady, 2009; Ellis, 1985,1994) believe that second language learning and second language acquisition are strongly distinct. They define the term *acquisition* as a less deliberate, subconscious process of

mastering language, and often associate it with the manner in which learners "pick up" a language through exposure. In contrast, they define *learning* as a deliberate, conscious attempt to master a language by consciously studying it. Thus, these researchers retain the idea that although learning and acquisition are related, they are also two distinct types of cognitive behaviour. Ellis (1994) argues that such distinctions have strong validity, yet they are very problematic, particularly because of the difficulty of demonstrating whether the knowledge learners possess is of the "acquired" or the "learnt" kind. For this reason, similar to Archibald and O'Grady (2009) and Ellis (1985, 1994), the term "Second Language Acquisition" (SLA) will be used throughout this paper to stay consistent with existing literature.

Archibald and O'Grady *(*2009) state that the term *second language* is used to refer to a language that is acquired after the first or native language is relatively established. Therefore, acquiring a second language is not applicable in a situation where a child is learning two languages simultaneously during a bilingual upbringing.

Contrary to first language acquisition, second language learners already have an established language system for communication, which means they acquire a second language differently than they do the first (Archibald and O'Grady, 2009). According to Krashen (1988), first language acquisition is the process of natural assimilation, whereas learning a second language (L2) is a conscious one. This fact justifies the separation of first and second acquisition, and thus treating SLA as a separate field of study.

Bown and White (2010) state that linguistic theories related to SLA tend to belong to one of three camps: cognitive, social, or socio-cognitive. The authors assert that "according to cognitive theories of second language acquisition, learning is an individual

mental activity independent of social context. Cognitive views of language learning also downplay the role of affect in the acquisition process" (p.334). Several theorists (Gass and Mackey, 2006; Block 2003; cited in Bown and White, 2010, p.334) have rejected the cognitive model of language learning, disputing that language is primarily a social tool, and that the social context, as well as affective issues, play a crucial role in language acquisition. They assert that the dichotomy between social and cognitive views of language learning is artificial, and that social interaction is more than just a context in which language learning takes place, but that it is rather the very source of language learning (Bown and White, 2010).

In socio-cognitive theory, language is far from being modularized within the brain. It is intertwined with experiences, cultural knowledge, self-identity and emotions (Collentine and Freed 2004, cited in Bown and White, 2010, p.334).

Swain (2012) argues, "Learning another language is not just a cognitive process, but an emotional one as well" (p.195). Emotions have been neglected in SLA literature and over the last several decades of SLA theorizing and research, cognition has been given priority over emotions (Schutz and Pekrun, 2007). Prioritization of cognition over emotion goes as far back as Socrates, who emphasized the pursuit of reason, and recognized the negative influence of emotions on reason. The separation between reason and emotions further developed up to the Enlightenment period. This view placed emotions in an inferior role, describing them as "more primitive, less intelligent, more bestial, less dependable, and more dangerous than reason" (Solomon, 1993, p.3). Tension between reason and emotion "provides the social-historical back drop from which current views on emotions continue to emerge" (Schutz and Decuir, 2002, p.127).

Second language acquisition was recognized as a field of research as of the late 1960s and early 1970s, primarily researched in the field of behaviourism in psychology and structuralism in linguistics, SLA was strictly viewed as a cognitive process with minimal consideration for the effects on one's emotions on learning (Swain, 2012).

As a revolutionary argument for the time, Krashen (1985) hypothesized the existence of an affective filter on learning (first proposed by Dulay and Burt in 1977). The filter controls how much input, or knowledge, the learner comes into contact with, and consequently how much knowledge is acquired. The filter is "affective" because the factors, which determine its strength, have to do with the learner's motivation, self-confidence, or anxiety level. Learners with high motivation and self-confidence and with low anxiety have low filters and so let in more input or in other words, acquire more knowledge. Conversely, learners with low motivation, little self-confidence, and high anxiety have high filters and so receive little input. In his hypothesis Krashen (1985) postulates how positive emotions are related to a low affective filter. Thus by letting in more input, more learning would occur. Conversely, negative emotions are related to a high affective filter and thus, lesser learning.

Furthermore, Vygotsky (2000), among others (Del Rio and Alvarez, 2002), postulated the existence of a dynamic system of meaning in which the affective and intellectual unify and enhance each other to create a learning outcome greater than either of them alone. Vygotsky (1987) provides an example from the physical sciences demonstrating the implications of thinking about emotions and cognition as separate, rather than an intertwined unity. He explains that one cannot understand how water extinguishes fire by deconstructing it into its elements of hydrogen and oxygen. Similarly

7

it is the unity of cognition and emotion that will help us understand language learning processes.

If theories of SLA were to be devised solely on cognitive considerations, the most fundamental side of human behaviour would be neglected, which we now turn to in the next section.

2.2 Affective Variables in Second Language Acquisition

In general the most widely renowned theories among SLA researchers are those that acknowledge the crucial role the student plays in the learning process. This has given rise to the need for additional information from the field of psychology. The affective domain is considered to be as influential as the cognitive in determining students' achievement and success (Chastain, 1976). It is now generally accepted that the separation of a student's cognitive capabilities from her/his emotional psychological state is impossible (Vygotsky, 2000, 1987; Del Rio and Alvarez, 2002).

Affect refers to emotion or feeling. Brown (2007) indicates that the affective domain is the emotional side of human behaviour, and it may be juxtaposed to the cognitive side. He further argues that the affective domain is difficult to describe scientifically due to the large number of variables that are associated when considering the emotional side of human behaviour in second language acquisition. One issue in striving for affective explanations of language success is presented by the task of empirically defining, subdividing and categorizing abstract factors of the affective domain. Standardized psychological tests often form an operational definition of such

concepts, but constant revisions to these concepts are evidence of ongoing struggle for validity (Brown, 2007). [1]

According to Brown (2007) two facets of the affective domain in SLA are: 1) the intrinsic side of affectivity, which are personality and individual factors within a person that contribute to the success of language acquisition, and 2) sociocultural variables that emerge, as the second language learner brings not only two languages into contact but also two cultures. Sociocultural variables, although important in SLA, will not be thoroughly discussed in this paper as the ultimate goal of this study involves exploring individual beliefs, particularly self-efficacy in the field of SLA. Nevertheless, since this research will study SLA within a specific ethnicity (Iranian men and women), certain sociocultural norms (i.e gender) in the Iranian culture, and their impact on learning will be discussed.

2.2.1 Individual Differences in Second Language Acquisition

There is a considerable body of research on individual differences in the area of SLA. Individual differences involve a wide scope of domains including personality traits, learning styles, *learners' beliefs*, strategies, aptitude, age, and motivation. Research shows that individual differences predict success in language learning (Raoofi *et al.*,

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[1] A general understanding of the affective domain in human behaviour is presented by Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia (1964). They argue that the first two levels of developing affectivity are *receiving* and *responding* to the environment surrounding us. In other words, it involves being willing to receive and tolerate a stimulus and giving it controlled attention and then responding to it. The third level of affectivity includes *valuing* and placing worth on a thing, behaviour or a person. The fourth level of affectivity is the *organization* of values into a system of beliefs, regulating interrelationships among them, and establishing a hierarchy of values within the system. Ultimately, individuals understand themselves in terms of our *value system* and we act in accordance with the values we have internalized.

2012). While it can be proven that self-efficacy is a powerful variable predicting English as second language learners' performance, it has apparently received the least attention as compared to other cognitive and affective variables (Jabbarifar, 2011), which motivated this study's focus on self-efficacy. The following section of this paper explores *learners' beliefs* about their ability to learn English as a second language using the theoretical framework of self-efficacy and attribution theory

Learners' Beliefs

Yang (1999) suggests that second language learners often hold different beliefs about language learning, which are influenced by previous experiences, or shaped by their own cultural backgrounds. He further states that learners' preconceived beliefs about language learning would likely affect the way they learn a second language. Yang (1999) and Jabbarifar (2011) propose a theoretical construct of language learning beliefs. They claim that beliefs are composed of two main dimensions: *meta- cognitive* refers to learners' knowledge or beliefs about second language learning or learning in general; the *motivational* dimension comprises of learners' attitudes, emotional reactions, or self-efficacy beliefs about his/her second language learning.

Self-efficacy

In the field of SLA, the motivational element that regulates goal setting and affects the translation of goals into action is known as *personal agency beliefs* (Kormos *et al.*, 2011). In educational psychology, these beliefs are embodied in two constructs: self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1986; Bandura *et al.,* 1977) and self-concept beliefs

(Shavelson *et al.*,1976). Self-efficacy beliefs express one's opinion of their capability to perform a given learning task that is future-oriented; whereas self-concept beliefs are more general assessments based on one's past experiences and are broader evaluations of one's general self-worth or esteem (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003; Bandura, 1997; Pajares and Miller, 1994). Self-concept can be domain-specific but not task-specific (Huang, 2011). A learner's self-concept encompasses his/her entire personality. It is the product of all the physical, cognitive, social, economic, moral, and emotional factors. In comparative tests, efficacy beliefs are found to be highly predictive of behaviour, whereas the effect of self-concept beliefs on behaviour is weaker and indecisive (Pajares and Kranzler,1995; Pajares and Miller,1994,1995). Therefore the concept of self-efficacy is pursued in this study to further understand its effect on learners' behavior.

Moreover, self-esteem and self-efficacy are often used interchangeably, although they refer to different things. Self-efficacy is related to judgments of personal capability, whereas self-esteem is concerned with judgments of self-worth (Bandura, 1997). By self-esteem, scholars refer to the evaluation that individuals make and maintain with regard to themselves; it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicates the extent to which individuals believe themselves to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy. Thus, self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in attitudes that individuals hold towards themselves (Coopersmith, 1967, p.4). While these concepts are similar, self-esteem "reflects more *global* beliefs that one can cope with almost any task" (McCollum, 2003, p.21), whereas self-efficacy demonstrates beliefs about one's capabilities to successfully accomplish a *specific task* (Bandura, 1997, 1986, 1984).

A study by Ching (2002) shows that highly efficacious students are confident about what they can achieve (cited in Magogwe and Oliver, 2007). They set challenges for themselves and are committed to achieving them by working harder to avoid failure. When experiencing failure, they link it to insufficient effort or deficient knowledge and skills, which they believe they are capable of acquiring. It is also crucial to note that people who believe they are highly efficacious in a given task might also have little incentive to invest much effort in it (Bandura, 1990, 1997). As Confucian wisdom cautions regarding preparatory self-appraisal, "Too much confidence has deceived many a one." Thus, some self-doubt about one's efficacy provides incentives to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to successfully accomplish a task (Bandura, 1990, 1997). However, in applying skills already developed, a strong belief in one's efficacy is essential to mobilize and sustain the effort needed to succeed in difficult tasks, which is hard to achieve if one is doubt-ridden. Bandura (1997) argues, "self-doubt creates the impetus for acquiring knowledge and skills, but it hinders proficient use of developed skills" (p.76). His argument will be readdressed in the discussion section of this paper.

Furthermore, Krueger and Dickson (1994), Banduar and Jourden (1991), and Bandura (1986, 1990) assert that those who have high sense of efficacy visualize success scenarios that provide positive guidance for performance. To the contrary, those who judge themselves as inefficacious interpret uncertain situations as risky and are inclined to visualize failure scenarios. Thus, learners with a high sense of efficacy visualize themselves executing activities skillfully, and enhance their performance, whereas inefficacious learners are more inclined to visualize failure scenarios which undermine their performance. The reverse is also evident, where "cognitive enactments of

efficacious actions[…]strengthen efficacy beliefs" (Bandura, 1997, p.117; Bandura *et al.,*1977). Krueger and Dickson (1994), Bandura and Jourden (1991), Bandura (1986,1997) and Bandura *et al.*'s (1977) argument in this regard strengthens this study's findings as will be raised in section five of the paper.

Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy theory at the individual level addresses the origins of efficacy beliefs, their structure and function, and the process through which they produce diverse outcomes. Bandura (1997) asserts, "The value of a theory is judged by the power of the methods it yields to effect changes. Self-efficacy theory provides explicit guidelines on how to enable people to exercise some influence over how they live their life" (Bandura, 1997, p.10).

In his book, Bandura (1986) introduces the *Social Cognitive Theory*, which emphasizes the role of self-referent phenomena that adopts an agentic view of personality. He further explains, "Operative agency involves more than just possessing different categories of means" (Bandura, 1997, p.27). In other words, means, which encompass cognitive, behavioural and motivational self-regulative skills, are not fixed entities that one can gain achievement by mere possession of. The results people produce depend on how well they *use* available means. Therefore, the implementation aspect of it is an essential part of agency. People with the same means may perform proficiently or poorly in challenging situations because their efficacy beliefs affect how well they use the means at their disposal (Bandura, 1990). Beliefs about the effectiveness of particular

types of means will not lead individuals to success if they hold doubts in their ability to develop the required means or use them skillfully in difficult situations (Bandura, 1997). When learners have a low sense of self-efficacy they do not exert much effort into effecting changes, as they become disinterested and convinced of their powerlessness (Bandura, 1997). This will be reinforced in the discussion section as it will strengthen my argument. Studies by scholars demonstrate that belief in one's own inability to secure valued outcomes easily attained by others of similar standing mostly leads to depressive moods and cognitive debilitation of performance (Bloom, Yates and Brosvic, 1984; Davis and Yates, 1982). For that reason, self-efficacy beliefs comprise the key factor of human agency as this study attempts to demonstrate. If people believe they have no power to produce results, they will not put effort into making things happen. Once formed, self-efficacy beliefs regulate aspirations, behavioural choices, mobilization and maintenance of effort, and affective reactions (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) states that people can exercise influence over what they do, and therefore, people's beliefs in their efficacy affect almost everything they do: how they think, feel and behave.

Several studies point to the facilitative role of self-efficacy beliefs in various academic and educational contexts (Moafian and Ghanizadeh, 2009; Schunk and Meece, 2005; Pajares, 1996). Similarly, emotional skills have received considerable research interest in the field of education and psychology. The literature related to the definition of emotional intelligence explains this term as a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own emotions and to use the information to guide thinking and actions (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Empirical studies demonstrate that emotional intelligence positively correlates with academic achievement and other cognitive,

affective, and metacognitive factors beneficial to learning (Hashemi and Ghanizadeh, 2011; Fahim and Pishghadam, 2007).

The major finding of the study done by Hashemi and Ghanizadeh (2011) on the relationship between second language learners' emotional intelligence and self-efficacy demonstrate a positive association between the two constructs. In other words, enhancing second language learners' emotional intelligence tends to promote their beliefs in their capabilities (self-efficacy beliefs) to organize and execute the courses of action required for successful performance. Although exploring emotional intelligence further is out of the scope of this paper, it is crucial to mention it in the literature as it greatly impacts second language learners' self-efficacy.

The next section explores the influence of self-efficacy on SLA in particular, and how psychological and affective states such as stress and anxiety can be significant to one's efficacy.

Self-efficacy and Second Language Acquisition

There are two major types of beliefs learners hold when acquiring a second language: general beliefs about learning that promote or inhibit the learner's desire to acquire new knowledge, and beliefs about language acquisition. For instance, the belief that making linguistic mistakes is harmful in SLA or that men are not very good at acquiring a foreign language may inhibit SLA process (Rubin, 2005). Successful language learners possess productive beliefs, which is a strong sense of self-efficacy about themselves as learners and about the learning process. They are confident in their

ability to succeed and recognize that success is often followed by some unavoidable frustration that can be compensable (Rubin, 2005, p. 46).

Language learners' skills can be easily overruled by their self-doubts, so that even highly talented learners make poor use of their capabilities under circumstances that undermine their belief in themselves (Bandura and Jourden, 1991; Wood and Bandura, 1989). Similarly, a resilient sense of efficacy enables individuals to do extraordinary things by productive use of their skills in the face of difficult language learning circumstances (White, 1982). Therefore, as many scholars (Rahimipour and Nariman-jahan, 2010; Rahimi and Abedini, 2009; Hsieh and Schallert, 2008; Pajares, 2003; Pajares and Miller, 1995; Pajares and Kranzler, 1995; Bandura and Jourden, 1991; Bandura, 1990; Schunk, 1984; Bandura, 1986, 1997; Bandura and Schunk, 1981; Bandura *et al.,* 1977) reveal, self-efficacy has a powerful influence on second language learners' effort, tendency, and achievement. The findings section of this paper relatively demonstrates how second language learners who hold strong beliefs in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided. High self-efficacious language learners set themselves challenging goals and maintain strong commitment to them. They put high level of effort into what they do and heighten their effort in the face of failure (Bandura, 1997). They also approach potential stressors with the confidence that they can exercise some control over them. Bandura (1997) argues that such an efficacious outlook enhances performance accomplishments and reduces stress.

Psychological and affective states such as stress and anxiety can also provide information about one's efficacy perception. Two decades of research on second language anxiety (Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre, Noels, and Clément, 1997; Ganschow *et*

al.,1994; MacIntyre and Gardner,1994; Young,1991) indicate that this type of anxiety can have negative impacts on the language learning process.

As the discussion section of this paper attempts to show, stress and anxiety play a major affective role in second language acquisition. Bandura (1990) discusses how stress and anxiety can affect action by altering the quality and course of thinking. Learner anxiety is the feeling of worry, nervousness, and stress that many language learners experience when learning a second language (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). Anxiety is associated with feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, or worry (Scovel, 1978). Attempting to reduce individual's stress and anxiety, and to modify the language learner's negative debilitative state to a more positive facilitator state, also affects perceived self-efficacy beliefs (Hashemi and Ghanizadeh, 2011). MacIntyre (1995) states that "because anxious students are focused on both the task at hand and their reactions to it… [they] will not learn as quickly as relaxed students" (p.96).

Cheng (2001) investigates the relationships between language learning self-efficacy and language anxiety. The results reveal that students' level of anxiety about English class negatively correlate with their English self-efficacy. Students who have higher levels of second or foreign language class anxiety tend to have lower self-assessments of their second language ability. The relationship between these two concepts can also be illustrated in the findings of this study as well. By working and improving self-efficacy, second language learners could control the other affective variables, especially learner anxiety.

A study by Hsieh and Kang (2010) stresses the importance of identifying and altering learners' unhealthy attributions, which may lead to low self-efficacy. These

findings, in addition to studies by several other authors, reaffirm that self-efficacy is a good predictor of academic achievement (Heidari *et al.,* 2012; Multon, Brown, and Lent, 1991; Zimmerman and Bandura, 1994; Bandura, 1997).

The potential importance of second language learners' attributions and its impacts on self-efficacy are discussed in the following section.

Attribution Theory and Second Language Acquisition

The Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1985, 2000) focuses on learners' beliefs about themselves and how they explain their perceived success and failure, which can influence their beliefs about their own competence, the amount of effort they invest, their motivation, and ultimately, their level of achievement. Thus, the attribution theory lies within a constructivist framework and deals with the ways by which individuals construct their own views and meanings from the world around them.

Weiner (1985, 2000, 2006) explains that attribution factors are partially related to dimensions of locus of causality (internal versus external), and controllability, which constitute the majority of the self-efficacy questionnaire of this study. Therefore, it is crucial to allocate the following section to investigate how attribution factors influence a second language learners' self-efficacy, and reciprocally, how low or high self-efficacy of learners contribute to the attributions they make for their success or failure.

Locus of causality refers to whether or not learners perceive the causes of their success or failure in relation to the self; in other words, whether they attribute the results they gain to ability or effort (two internal factors), or to task difficulty or luck (two

external factors). Numerous studies indicate that causal attributions can influence language achievement strivings by the effect it mediates in perceived self-efficacy (Hsieh and Kang, 2010; Relich, Debus, and Walker, 1986; Schunk and Gunn, 1986). For instance, the results of Hsieh and Kang's (2010) study indicate that learners with higher self-efficacy tend to attribute test outcomes to internal and personal factors while learners with lower self-efficacy tended to attribute test outcomes to external factors. Low efficacious language learners may feel discouraged and pull away from future tasks, which can then lead to a sense of helplessness and lower language achievement (Hsieh and Kang, 2010; Bandura, 1986).

Ability is perceived as an *acquirable skill* that can be increased by gaining knowledge and perfecting competencies. This way of thinking will lead learners to seek opportunities to expand their knowledge and competencies. These learners view missteps and setbacks not as personal failures but as learning experiences indicating that greater effort is needed to succeed. Such learners judge their capabilities and measure their success more by personal improvement than by comparison against the achievements of others (Bandura, 1997). By contrast, when ability is perceived as an *inherent aptitude,* performance level is believed to reflect a learner's endowed capacity. In this view, errors and deficient signify intellectual limitations. For self-protection these learners ignore opportunities to learn more about their proficiencies when they do poorly.

Controllability refers to the extent to which individuals have control over different causes (Pishghadam and Zabihi, 2011). Thus, learners with a high self-efficacy, for example, generally have the opinion that they are in control of their own learning experience; that their own actions and decisions (effort and ability) shape their learning.

On the other hand, learners with low self- efficacy see their learning process as somewhat out of their hands and thus attributed to external factors (Bandura, 1997). In the field of SLA, several scholars (Hsieh and Schallert, 2008; Hsieh, 2004; Williams *et al.*, 2004; Pintrich and Schunk, 2002; Bernhardt, 1997) have examined the relationship between second and foreign language learners' attribution and their second language achievement. The results indicate that those learners who made more internal and personal attributions received higher grades in class than those who made more external and non-personal attributions. Hsieh and Kang's (2010) study as well as others (Schunk and Pajares, 2005; Bandura, 1997) depict that successful academic outcomes are related to feelings of personal control over the learning task. When students feel in control of the learning situation, they are prone to put in more effort as well as persist when confronted by challenges (Hsieh and Kang 2010; Weiner, 2000). On the other hand, students who attribute negative outcomes to uncontrollable factors like lack of ability or teacher bias, may develop helplessness (Hsieh and Kang, 2010).

Furthermore, Pishghadam and Zabihi's (2011) look specifically at Iranian second language learners and how effort attributions, more than ability attributions were responsible for higher scores in EFL achievement. The authors suggest that Iranian collectivist culture might have contributed to these results. Smith and Bond (1998) state: "a tendency to make effort attributions may be a characteristic of all collectivist cultures" (cited in Brown, Gray, and Ferrara, 2005, p.6), whereas ability attribution is more highly praised in American individualist culture (Hsieh, and Schallert, 2008; Hsieh, 2004). The significance of effort attributions among Iranian second language learners is also

reinforced in this study, which will be further examined in section five.

A learner's culture can have significant impact on their attribution. Since attribution factors are changeable from culture to culture (Pishghadam and Zabihi, 2011; Brown *et al.*, 2005), the purpose of this study is to focus specifically on Iranian newcomers, coming from a collectivist society such as Iran to an individualistic Canadian culture to learn English as a second language.

2.2.2 Socio-Cultural Factors in SLA

Social and cultural factors affect students' SLA by influencing the attitudes held by learners, and consequently lead to different levels of second language proficiency. Bandura (1990) points out to an example of cultural stereotyping as a way in which social judgments affect learners' perceptions of capability. He further explains that people are placed into valued and de-valued groups on the basis of their ethnicity, race, gender and etc. Those who accept the stereotyped evaluations of others will hold themselves in low regard despite their talents and it will affect their performance (Bandura, 1990).

A few socio-cultural variables in SLA research are socio-economic status, ethnicity/race, age, and gender (Ellis, 1994; Chastain, 1976). Due to the focus of this research, the discussion of socio-cultural factors will be restricted to how gender affects self-efficacy beliefs and hence SLA among second language learners.[2]

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[2] Another noteworthy socio-cultural factor that affects self-efficacy is the differences between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. Collectivistic societies emphasize common interest, while individualistic ones prioritize personal achievement (Hashemi and Ghanizadeh, 2011; Hofstede,1984). Therefore, a study conducted by Scholz *et al.,* (2002) on culture differences in self-efficacy formation, determined whether or not general self-efficacy is a universal construct.

Gender is a highly significant determinant of language learning (Ellis, 1994).[3]

Ellis *et al.* (2008) discovered female superiority in language development, spelling, and reasoning, whereas the majority of research indicates males with better performance on verbal analogies, vocabulary, and adult literacy (Payne and Lynn, 2011). Furthermore, Payne and Lynn's (2011) argue that females have better ability than males in second language ability. However in contrast to the investigator's own findings in section five of this paper, the authors discuss the better performance of females in second language ability.

With respect to self-efficacy beliefs, Bandura (1990) argues that whereas males tend to inflate their capability, females generally disparage their sense of competence. He explains that these differential patterns originate from parental gender-linked beliefs regarding their children's capabilities. Bandura (1990) believes that adoption of feminine gender-role identity is also linked to underestimation of female capabilities.

Having said that, a study by Hashemi and Ghanizadeh (2011) found no differences between Iranian male and female foreign language learners in their sense of self-efficacy. Similarly, Pajares (2002) argues that males and females do not differ significantly in their sense of self-efficacy beliefs. Thus, with reference to these scholars

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The results of their study done on 19,120 participants in 25 countries demonstrate that participants from collective cultures had low general self-efficacy.

[3] A distinction is made between "sex" and "gender". The former involves a biological distinction, while the latter is a social one. A number of sociolinguistics currently prefer the term "gender" because it places the emphasis on the social construction of "male" and "female" (Kramarae,1990, cited in Ellis,1994, p.202). As Labov (1991) asserts, "there is little reason to think that sex is an appropriate category to explain linguistic behaviour"(p.206, cited in Ellis, 1994, p.202). In this study, the term "gender" will be used in order to acknowledge the social construction attached to the concept.

there appears to be no connection between gender and self-efficacy, which reinforces the findings of this paper.

With limited research on this topic and variable findings to date, the issue of gender differences in self-efficacy remains an area of interest among researchers, which ultimately motivated the investigator to add a gender dimension to the study of self-efficacy in the realm of SLA.

2.3 Conclusion

It is noteworthy that in the last ten years, there has been growing interest in self-efficacy beliefs within the field of SLA (Raoofi *et al*., 2012). However, it has rarely been examined in a second language-learning context (Hsieh and Schallert, 2008).

Self-efficacy theory prescribes an appropriate model of measurement along different activity domains. Self-efficacy beliefs should be measured in terms of particularized judgments of capability that may differ across realms of activity within a given domain. Raoofi *et al.,* (2012) asserts that self-efficacy is task-specific and differs from context to context. Bandura (1986, 1990) postulates that various ways are required to assess self-efficacy when tasks vary because assessment of self-efficacy is task-specific. Therefore, self-efficacy needs to be measured specifically rather than generally. High self-efficacy in one activity domain is not necessarily accompanied by high self-efficacy in other realms (Hofstetter, Hovell and Sallis, 1990; DiClemente, 1986). In this study, measures of self-efficacy must be tailored to domains of SLA in speaking and writing tasks of English language. This requires clear definition of the activity domain of

interest, a good conceptual analysis of its different facets, and the type of capabilities it calls upon, which will be discussed in the methodology section of this paper.

Raoofi *et al.* (2012) note that most studies regarding self-efficacy and SLA examine the relationship between self-efficacy and performance in reading and listening skills. However fewer studies have investigated the relationship between self-efficacy and performance in writing and speaking.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

As second language learners' self-efficacy has not been broadly studied, particularly in the Canadian context, this paper is exploratory in nature and used a qualitative approach to address the research questions.

While some studies have examined the importance of language proficiency in settlement, only a few have looked at SLA in a psychological context of how second language learners' beliefs might impact their SLA, and therefore their settlement and integration process in Canada. By using a qualitative approach, this study explores the participants' subjective experiences in the field of second language acquisition.

A qualitative research method was prioritized over quantitative tools, as it appeared more applicable to this study's research question. As Archer and Berdahl (2011) argue, the research question and research objective mainly identify the best way of approaching a

topic. In other words, if the intent was to make broad generalizations that are vast in scope, a quantitative approach was deemed appropriate. However, this research aims to establish a greater understanding of the links between conceptual categories. Thus a qualitative approach will be best in this case as it deals with conditions, norms, and values which constitute the basis of this study (Archer and Berdahl, 2011).

Moreover, since this study focuses on a sample of eight participants, it seemed reasonable to emphasize quality and detail, rather than generalizing and giving importance to breadth rather than depth (Archer and Berdahl, 2011). Hence, such in-depth investigation can rigorously be done by a qualitative research method that allows the researcher to explore respondents' individual beliefs through a self-efficacy questionnaire as well as open ended follow-up questions regarding how they perceive their ability to employ their speaking and writing skills in a second language.

Qualitative research is best suited to examine differences *in kind*' (King, Keohane, and Verba, 1993, p.5, cited in Archer and Berdahl, 2011). In this analysis a qualitative approach is proven to be a more useful tool since it attempts to explore *what kind* of correlation there is between ESL learners' self-efficacy and second language acquisition. The investigator trusted that with the in-depth set of questions offered within the questionnaire, it would be possible to determine how respondents perceive themselves as second language learners, and *what kind* of affective obstacles they are confronted with when attempting to exercise their speaking and writing skills.

For the reasons specified above, this study pursued a qualitative research method to further investigate matters of learner self-efficacy and SLA through preliminary research, which will be discussed in the next section.

3.2 Recruitment and Sampling

Data was gathered specifically from Iranian men and woman who have attained their academic education in an Iranian educational system and are now English Language Learners (ELL) in Canada. The target population for this study involved a number of individual newcomers from the Iranian community residing in the GTA. Eight Iranian newcomers were recruited; four men and four women, in order to add a gendered aspect to the study. The ideal sites to recruit participants were LINC[4] (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) classes at North York locations where there were higher possibilities of recruiting Iranian residents. Flyers were distributed among students in class and were posted on LINC public bulletin boards.

The sampling criteria were restricted to Iranian newcomers in the GTA community. While the investigator's own ethnic biases and familiarity with this specific ethnic group did partially influence the sampling criteria, a gap could also be seen in literature regarding research on Iranian ESL learners and self-efficacy in a context of the Canadian language community. Taking into account the distinct situations between learning a foreign language in one's home country and learning it in the target language society, this study finds it crucial to take a step further and investigate language learners' subjective experiences to achieve a second language in the new country they have immigrated to.

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[4] "The Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program supports language training in English and French to adult newcomers who are permanent residents. Launched in 1992, the program helps newcomers integrate into Canada and their communities" (CIC, 2013) (http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/backgrounders/2013/2013-10-18.asp)

This study recruited participants aged 18 and over, which means that it excluded the participation of children and adolescents. As discussed in the literature review, in the section relevant to the socio-cultural factors affecting SLA, age is noted as one of the significant variables affecting second language acquisition (Ellis, 1994; Chastain, 1976), and so a smaller age range was preferred for research purposes. However, after facing some difficulties with participant recruitment, the investigator adapted age requirements to permit participation from a wide age group.

The study enrolled participants from levels 6 and 7 at LINC, with reference to the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2012 (CLB)[5]. At this level, participants have an intermediate level of second language proficiency, and better able to contribute to the study objectives.

Based on the notion that LINC is envisioned as a program that focuses on the newcomers' language proficiency and introduces them to the Canadian way of life in the first three years of settlement (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2003, p. xiii), the recruited participants were recent newcomers who had been in Canada for no more than three years, arriving between 2010 to 2013. Newcomers are most likely to confront language learning challenges in the first years of their arrival as they learn English, making them a suitable target group for this study.

All eight participants who responded to the recruitment flyer were interviewed.

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[5] "As of January 1997 language learners in Canada are being assessed through the Canadian Language Benchmarks Assessment (CLBA). The Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) is a new initiative by the federal government to standardize the description of English as a second language proficiency levels nationally. These descriptors range from literacy (pre-benchmark) to Benchmark 12 and are organized into skill areas of speaking, listening, reading and writing" (Khalideen, 1998, p.32).

The interviews were conducted in booked study rooms at a public library.

3.3 Instruments and Procedure

The two distinct instruments utilized in the study for data collection were a self-efficacy questionnaire (in Farsi language), and a standardized English speaking and writing test.

The self-efficacy questionnaire was derived from three questionnaires of Beliefs About Language Learning (BALLI) developed by Hortwiz (1985), Persian Adaptation of the General Self-efficacy Scale constructed by Nezami, Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1996) and Morgan-Links Student Efficacy Scale (MJSES) developed by Jinks and Morgan (1999) (see Appendix A for the study's Self-efficacy Questionnaire in English).

The self-efficacy questionnaire contained two sections: In the first segment participants were asked to indicate their agreement and opinion on each statement that attempted to assess the respondents' self-efficacy with regards to learning English as a second language. Learners' self-efficacy was measured using the following five-point Likert scale: Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. The Likert scale is very effective in measuring people's attitudes, beliefs, emotions, feelings, perceptions, personality characteristics, and other psychological constructs (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, and Liao, 2004). The last question of the first segment employed a forced choice format asking respondents to indicate their perspective on how gender influences their SLA. The second section of the questionnaire solicited demographic information from participants (name, gender, age, year of arrival to Canada). The final question in this segment captured the participants' personal belief on how well they will be able to

28

accomplish the speaking and writing task assigned in the study. The assessment scale used for this question was created by the researcher, assigning the highest numerical value to the participant who believed will perform excellent and the lowest to the one who presumed he/she will perform poorly.

The other significant instrument employed involved a standardized test including one speaking and one writing task (see Appendix B). The investigator derived the questions from the LINC 5-7 Curriculum Guidelines[6]. By evaluating the participants' productive skills, the researcher attempted to seek the relationship between learners' perceived self-efficacy and their actual SLA in the speaking and writing domains.

After completing the speaking and writing tasks, participants were asked to self-report their belief about their proficiency in speaking and writing in English. This question gave more depth to the data collected on the learner's feelings of competency and it is believed to increase the authenticity and credibility of the questionnaire by asking participants a follow-up question as such to allow learners to answer to an open-ended question and comment on their beliefs and capabilities in a more in depth manner.

3.4 Coding and Data Analysis

Self-efficacy questions in the questionnaire were coded by the investigator. Likert scale items were coded from 1 to 5. They were coded using the following principles: for 18 questions, 1= strong self-efficacy; 5= low self-efficacy. For the remaining 6 questions, 1= low self-efficacy; 5= high self-efficacy. The reason behind utilizing two different coding for data analysis was due to the essence of the question.

[6] The LINC 5-7 Curriculum Guidelines are developed by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB).

The criteria utilized in evaluating learners' speaking and writing skills were based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) 2012. As CLB demonstrates, language learners in LINC 6-7 have adequate (CLB 7) and fluent (CLB 8) intermediate proficiency in carrying out speaking tasks, and developing (CLB 6) and adequate (CLB 7) intermediate proficiency in performing writing tasks. Please see Appendix C for the assessment tools.[7]

3.5 Limitations of the Research Method

One significant limitation of the study was the sample size. Admittedly, the eight participants that formed the sample cannot represent the diversity of Iranian second language-learning newcomers. No indisputable conclusions can be drawn about the general population of Iranian second language learners based on this study. Furthermore, when comparing the self-efficacy of men and women, a larger sample size is required in order to make adequate comparisons between the two gender-specific groups. In spite of this limitation, the study's findings offer a valuable insight into the experiences and observations of the selected participants and serve as a catalyst for future research.

A second limitation was the social desirability effect that could have influenced the participants' responses to the self-efficacy questionnaire. During the interviews, the participants may have answered the questions in a way that corresponded with how they would like to ideally present themselves. As a result, their answers may not include all the details they might otherwise have included if they had not been audio recorded and tested by a stranger. This study presumes and accepts what participants say as true and

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[7] The assessment tools used in this study include CLB Assessment Report,
CLB Speaking Evaluation Criteria, and CLB Writing Evaluation Criteria (Appendix C).

valid, while acknowledging the possibility for distortions.

Another limitation was the overlooking of certain criteria in the evaluation of participants' speaking and writing performance, namely the participants' pronunciation in the speaking task and error frequency (proportion and percentage of error types) in the writing task. The two criteria are significant when assessing second language achievement, yet due to the investigator's lack of language instruction expertise, these criteria were not included in the language evaluation process.

Finally, it would have been beneficial to take into account the socio-economic and educational status of participants, as it could possibly have a significant effect on learners' self-efficacy. Such considerations would lead to greater credibility of research, and a greater understanding of the study's findings (Ellis, 1994; Chastain, 1976).

4. Findings

The following chart demonstrates the analysis of the eight participants' self-efficacy and their speaking and writing scores. The self-efficacy scores are out of a total of 115 points. The median for self-efficacy is 91. So the participants who scored 91 and higher on the self-efficacy questionnaire are considered to possess relatively high self-efficacy beliefs with regards to SLA. To the contrary, the participants who scored lower than 91 have relatively low self-efficacy beliefs when discussing their abilities to speak or write English as a second language. Figure 1 and 2 illustrate the results for two of the questions asked in the self-efficacy questionnaire as samples that reflect the overall self-efficacy results the majority of respondents scored. The six respondents who agreed to the following two questions scored higher on their overall self-efficacy, and the two respondents who disagreed with the question scored low in beliefs of their language competency.

Figure 1-When the instructor asks a question, I raise my hand to answer, even if I'm not sure about it being correct.
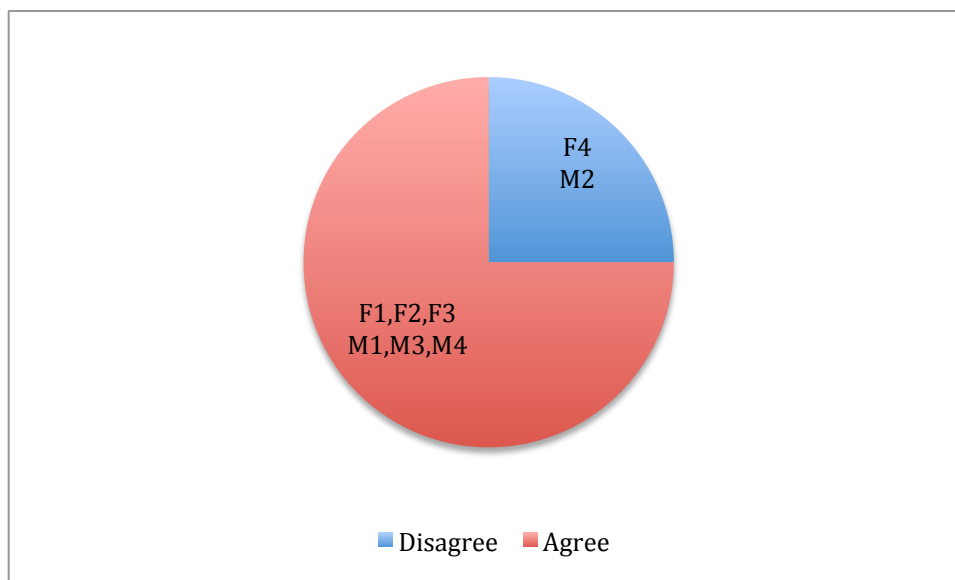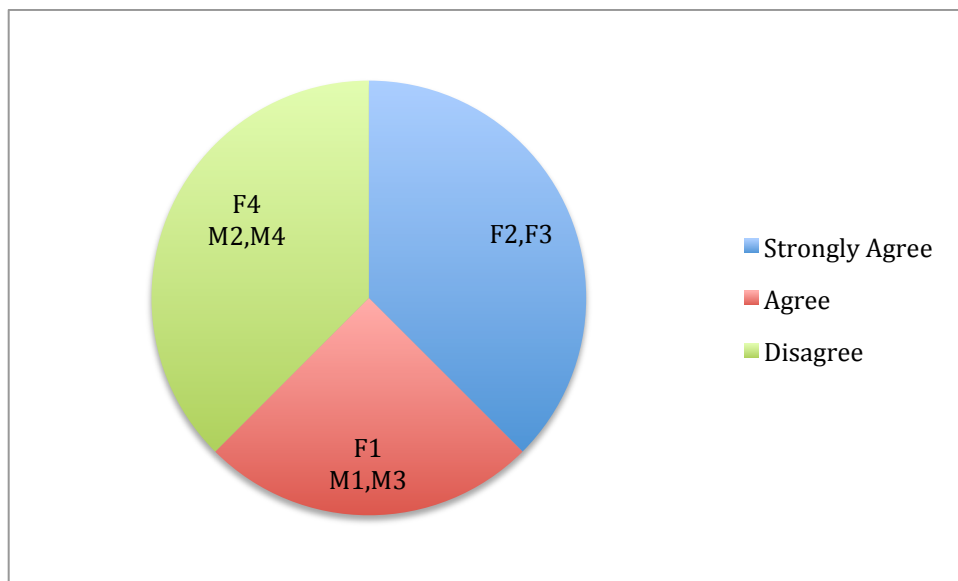
Figure 2- The more difficult the language task, the more challenging and enjoyable it is for me.

Participant	Self-Efficacy Score	Speaking Holistic	Speaking Analytical	Writing Holistic	Writing Analytical	Mean Language Score
M1	91	2	2	3.5	3	2.62
M2	81	3	3	1	1	2
M3	91	3.5	3.5	2	2	2.75
M4	99	3	3	3	3	3
F1	91	2	1.5	2	2	1.87
F2	97	3	3	3	3	3
F3	95	2	2	1.5	1.5	1.75
F4	80	3	3	3	3	3

With respect to the participants' English language achievement, the last five columns of the chart above demonstrate their language scores based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) 2012. The linguistic evaluation of participants' speaking and writing scores are out of a total of 4 (refer to Appendix C).

Score 1= not having the ability to achieve required success at a given level
Score 2= the language learner needs help
Score 3= satisfactory benchmark achievement
Score 4 = more than satisfactory for that specific language level

When evaluating learners' speaking and writing performances holistically, the investigator utilized the CLB achievement report (Appendix C) to assess participants' functional effectiveness, which is an overall holistic evaluation of learners' success in communicating as required by the task. It describes whether the global purpose of communication has been achieved.

Learners' performances were evaluated analytically for some qualitative aspects of communication, which the investigator selected according to the nature of the task and its requirements. The chart available in Appendix C reflects the CLB analytic considerations when evaluating learners' performances.

Considering that the primary research question outlining this study is investigating the relationship between self-efficacy and SLA, the following section presents the findings in this respect. The results were different in the men and women participants, thus it is deemed beneficial to present the findings in a men vs. women approach. In the next two sections the correlation between self-efficacy and SLA will be individually examined with respect to the male and female participants.

Men's Self-Efficacy and SLA

As shown in the chart, a positive correlation can be seen between men's self-efficacy and their second language achievement. The respondents M1 and M3 who have relatively high self-efficacy scores of 91, have mean language scores of 2.62 and 2.75, respectively. Respondent M4 obtained 99, which is the highest score in self-efficacy and demonstrates a high average language score of 3. He stated in his comments:

" Had I been given more time, I trust I could've performed even better on my speaking and writing tasks. Nonetheless, I am confident about my language scores and I think I accomplished both tasks relatively well".

In other words, M1, M3, and M4 scored relatively high in terms of their self-efficacy, and also, on average, a higher score in their speaking and writing language achievement. Based on the results of respondent M2, his low self-efficacy score of 81 conforms to the relatively low result he acquired in his average language score, which was a score of 2 out of 4. After the interview, in the comments participant M2 made to the researcher he stated:

" Generally, I understand my weak performance in English is due to my low self-esteem and I am distressed for this matter. I don't believe I performed well neither on my speaking or my writing tasks".

Women's Self-Efficacy and SLA

Contrary to the findings derived from the male participants in this study, the results obtained by the four women were inconclusive, with no significant correlation

between their self-efficacy and language productivity scores.

Respondents F1 and F3 both were seen with relatively high self-efficacy scores. However, their average language achievement scores were significantly low. Respondent F1 with the self-efficacy score of 91 scored an average of 1.87 in her language achievement score, which is deemed low for the intermediate level where she stands. Similarly, F3 with a higher self-efficacy score of 95 did not score well on the language test, an average of 1.75, which is the lowest mark out of all the four women participants. On the other hand F4, despite having the lowest self-efficacy score of 80, scored 3 out of 4 as her average language productivity, which is considered significantly high. Respondent F2 was the only language learner to demonstrate both high self-efficacy (score of 97) and high language score (average of 3). Nonetheless, this is considered the only data gathered in the group of women that demonstrates a potential positive correlation between self-efficacy and SLA. She stated after the speaking and writing tasks:

> *"Considering the limited time I have for practicing and working on my English, I am pretty content with my abilities. I know if I had more time on my hands, I could perform even better. Nevertheless, I think with the amount of English knowledge I have institutionalized, I feel I was capable of successfully completing the speaking and writing tasks".*

Gender Differences and Self-Efficacy

Aside from investigating the correlation between self-efficacy and English language achievement among second language learners, this study also aims to look into gender differences in language learners' self-efficacy when performing speaking and

36

writing tasks. The figures below illustrate how male and female participants in this study are equal in the level of self-efficacy they possess in the SLA domain. In both groups three out of four participants had high self-efficacy beliefs in the SLA realm, with only one participant in each group having low self-efficacy beliefs.

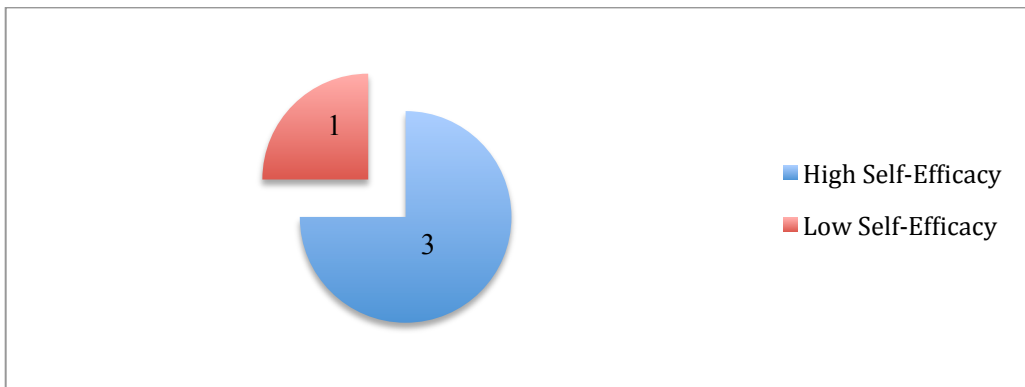**Figure 3- Self-Efficacy of Male Participants**
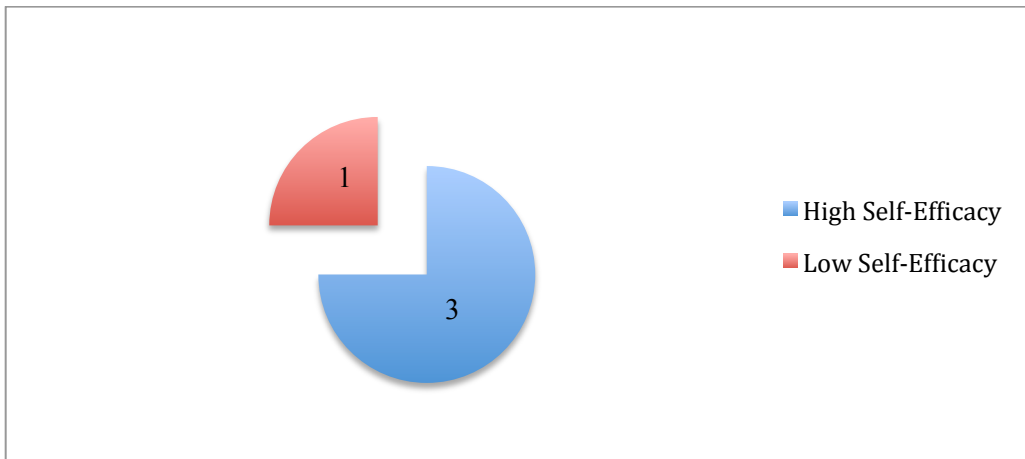

Figure 3- Self-Efficacy of Female Participants

Furthermore, question 28 of the self-efficacy questionnaire relatively uncovers participants' beliefs regarding the role of gender in SLA. The designated question asks respondents whether they believe men or women are more proficient in speaking English, or they believe both are equally competent in this respect. This item was designed in

order to obtain better understanding about men and women's *perception* of their gender performing as a catalyst or disruption to their second language learning. In other words, depending on how learners responded to this question they partially reveal their self-efficacy beliefs regarding SLA. Participants were asked about their thoughts on whether they themselves believe gender might have influence on their second language acquisition. Six out of the eight participants confirmed that "Both men and women are equally skilled in speaking English". They did not believe that gender differences have a significant role on how second language learners perform. Only two participants believed that "Women are more proficient than men in speaking English", which will further be discussed in the discussion section.

5. Discussion

This section will highlight the main themes derived from the research findings, their implications, and considerations for future research. The interviews conducted in this study revealed three main themes.

5.1 Self-Efficacy and Second Language Achievement

The first theme was demonstrating the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and second language achievement. Based on the findings for the male participants, it can be argued that there is a positive relationship between self-efficacy and second language achievement as hypothesized. Thus, the relatively high self-efficacy of three ESL male participants reflected through their average high scores in English speaking and writing

achievement, and the low self-efficacy of one remaining male participant led to an average low language achievement score. According to Kruegar and Dickson (1994) and Bandura (1986) it can be observed how respondents M3 and M4 with high self-efficacy visualized success scenarios, contributing to their high language marks and respondent M2 with lower self-efficacy visualized failure scenarios which contributed to his low language marks. Also conversely, with reference to Bandura's (1997) statement about cognitive enactments of efficacious actions strengthening efficacy beliefs, it can be demonstrated how respondent M1's self-efficacy beliefs were relatively high due to the spoken comments he made about gaining confidence in his abilities since he already achieved a high mark on a TOEFL[8] test he had taken before this interview. In other words, although the findings cannot be generalized to the Iranian population due to low sample size, the data collected from the four men participants support the argument of this study, as well as it complementing many scholars' discovery with reference to the positive correlation between self-efficacy beliefs learners hold and their second language achievement (Rahimipour and Nariman-jahan, 2010; Rahimi and Abedini, 2009; Hsieh and Schallert, 2008; Magogwe and Oliver, 2007; Rubin, 2005; Pajares, 2003; Pajares and Miller,1995; Pajares and Kranzler,1995; Krueger and Dickson, 1994; Bandura and Jourden, 1991; Bandura, 1990; Schunk, 1984; Bandura, 1986, 1997; Bandura and Schunk, 1981; Bandura *et al.,* 1977).

However, for the female participants in the study, the results obtained contradict the argument of this paper, regarding the hypothesized positive correlation between self-

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[8] TOEFL, formally known as "Test of English as a Foreign Language" was developed to measure the English language proficiency of non-native English language speakers wishing to enroll in English speaking universities.

efficacy beliefs and SLA. In other words, unlike the findings of male participants with regards to how there seemed to be a trend in their self-efficacy and second language productivity, three of the four women in the study, on the other hand, were not supporting this hypothesized correlation.

5.1.1 Investigator's Observations

The investigator's own observation and reflection from conducting this research can be utilized to explore more into the reasons underlying why all four female participants' self-efficacy score did not reflect in their language achievement scores. Some data gathered in the interviews were not reflected in the self-efficacy questionnaire as participants made spoken comments that were recorded by the investigator for further analysis, which will be referred to in the following section of this paper.

One reason for the discrepancy in female participants' results could be that the female participants' have variable understandings of second language achievement and can consequently define self-efficacy differently for themselves. As stated in their comments, respondents F1 and F3 were attaining English language mostly for communication means, and therefore might have completed the self-efficacy questionnaire based on the mere idea that they see themselves successfully accomplishing the task of communicating basic messages in English. Therefore, although they have low language marks for their intermediary language level, their high self-efficacy scores can be explained through their personal reasons of learning English in Canada versus out of necessity for their professional career. Respondents F2 and F4 on the other hand, wanted to attain English in order to achieve the requirements for an academic setting, and had

high personal standards with respect to their language competency. This might explain their relatively high language mark attained in this study, as they perhaps feel a greater drive to learn the complexities of the English language.

Despite her high language mark, respondent F4 did not perceive herself as a successful language learner. The investigator understands that participant F4's low self-efficacy in this matter can be partially due to the anxiety and stress she experienced during the interview. As discussed in the literature review, anxiety can have a negative effect on self-efficacy (Hashemi and Ghanizadeh, 2011; Cheng, 2001) as much as it can have an effect on SLA (Lightbown and Spada, 2006; Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre, Noels, and Clément,1997; Ganschow *et al*.,1994; MacIntyre and Gardner,1994; Young,1991). With respect to participants F1 and F4, it can be argued that anxiety influenced their second language performance and self-efficacy.

Participant F1 also exhibited anxiousness, and stated after the speaking and writing tasks:

> *"I am upset with how I presented on the speaking task and I believe I could've performed significantly better on my speaking task".*

The participant would not make eye contact with the interviewer during her speaking performance. She specifically asked the interviewer to keep distance with her during her speaking and writing performance, preferably turning away and facing her back. She indicated that the atmosphere of having the investigator in the same room caused her stress and anxiety. These observations can support the fact that anxiety can lead to poor second language performance.

Similarly, participant F4 stated:

> *"I'm not content with my performance. I believe I could have performed better had I controlled my anxiety during the language tasks".*

As results of participant F4's language scores indicate, despite her high language mark, she believes she is incapable of performing well in the second language speaking and writing tasks and she discusses how she encounters anxiety during the English speaking activities. Therefore, participant F4's level of anxiety could have negatively affected her self-efficacy score.

Furthermore, the negative correlation between F1 and F3's self-efficacy and their second language scores could be explained by Bandura's (1997) argument that some self-doubt about one's efficacy provides incentives to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to successfully accomplish a task. Perhaps the lack of self-doubt in F1 and F3 affected their persistence and motivation to achieve higher language learning.

5.2 Gender and Self-Efficacy

Aside from investigating the relationship between self-efficacy and SLA, the second main theme was to further investigate whether gender influences the degree of self-efficacy a second language learner might possess. Results of the study found that among the group of men and women in the study, three in each group equally obtained high self-efficacy and only one in each group had low self-efficacy.

Furthermore, when participants were asked about how they perceive gender

influencing their second language acquisition, interestingly, the only two participants who believed that women are more proficient in speaking English as a second language were also the only participants to receive low self-efficacy scores (respondents M2 and F4). For respondent M2, this belief could be a possible factor contributing to low self-efficacy beliefs. In other words, M2 having low self-efficacy can be partially due to him not believing that he, as a man, is as competent as a woman when it comes to second language productivity. For respondent F4, her belief of women's greater language competency did 'not reflect in the score that she attained for her self-efficacy. In fact, she scored the lowest self-efficacy rate (80), not only in the women, but the lowest out of all eight participants. In other words, although F4 believed women were more competent in SLA, she did not replicate this confidence when it came to forming her self-efficacy beliefs in the realm of second language productivity. Therefore, the findings of this study do not conclusively demonstrate that a learner's perception of gender differences in language competency affects their language performance.

Overall, the study did not find a substantial gender difference dimension when discussing the self-efficacy of second language learners. The results of this study are compatible with the findings of Hashemi and Ghanizadeh (2011) and Pajares (2002), concluding that males and females do not differ significantly in their sense of self-efficacy beliefs, and in contrast with Bandura's (1990) findings with respect to women generally disparaging their capabilities and men inflating their sense of competence.

Reasons to why a connection wasn't made between gender and self-efficacy in the realm of SLA can possibly be due to the social desirability effect that was previously discussed in the methodology section. Participants may have answered the self-efficacy

questions in a way that corresponded with how they would like to ideally present themselves to the investigator. This effect can entirely change the results of this study, by altering the reality that might exist among female and male language learners.

Furthermore, it is a possibility that choosing people farther along in LINC program, at levels 6-7, could suggest that learners at this level already feel a certain level of confidence about their English language skills and have already overcome the self-efficacy stresses experienced by beginner second-language learners. Alternatively, if the study focused on LINC participants at the beginner levels, the findings could have differed significantly with respect to self-efficacy and second language acquisition.

5.3 Ability vs. Effort Attribution

Findings were compatible with several studies (Pishghadam and Zabihi, 2011; Brown *et al.*, 2005; Smith and Bond, 1998) with regard to how Iranian collectivist culture can impact learners' attributions. Two of the following self-efficacy items in the questionnaire were devised to interpret whether effort or ability is more attributed to perceived success among Iranian second language learners. Below (Figure 4) illustrates and reaffirms that Iranian second language learners make effort attributions more than ability attributions (Figure 5) in their second language learning.

Figure 4-If I put enough effort into it, I can solve even the toughest speaking and writing English tasks
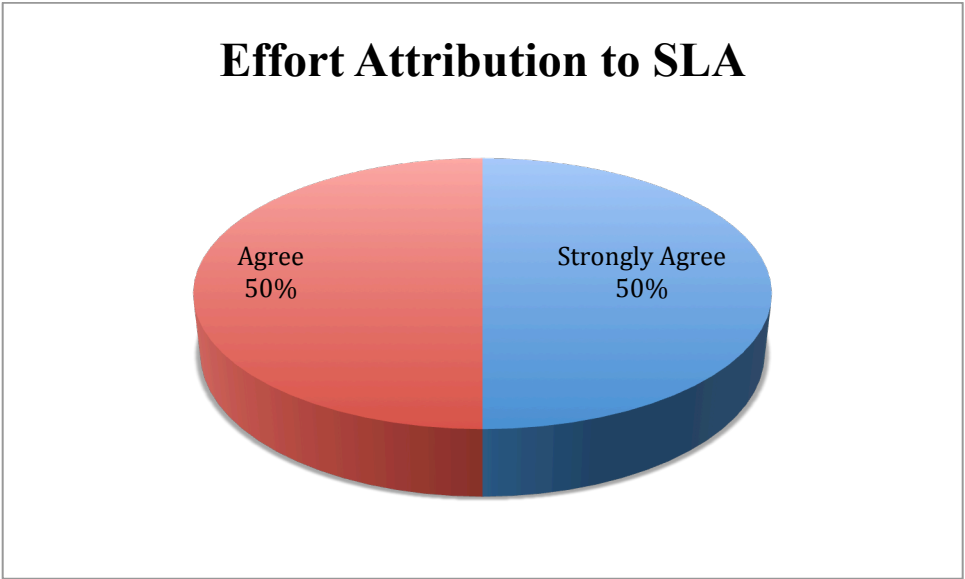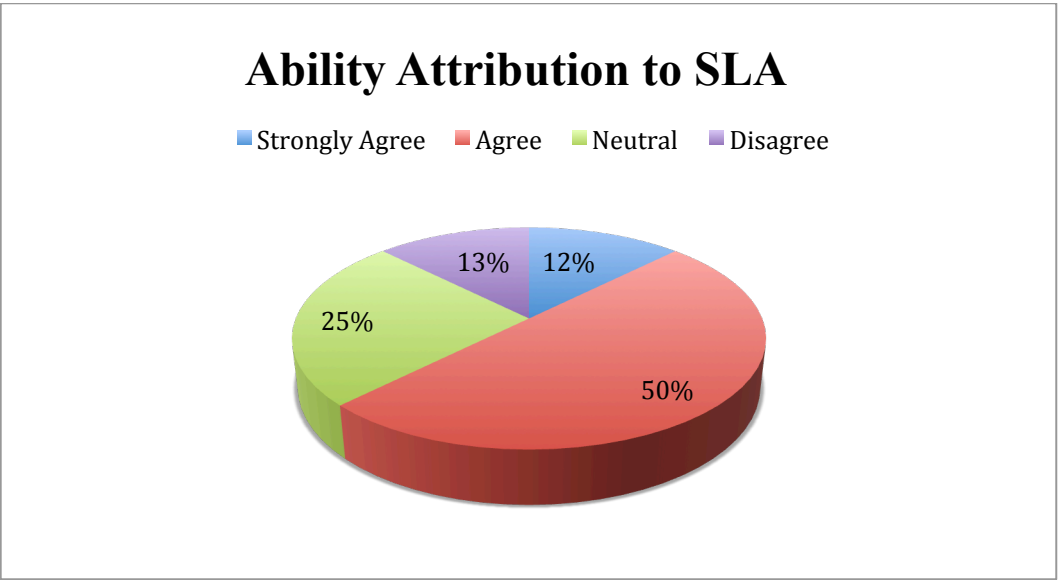

Effort Attribution to SLA

Agree 50%

Strongly Agree 50%

Figure 5- I have a special ability in learning English

Ability Attribution to SLA

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

13% 12%

25%

50%

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), which calls for the emphasis of the affective domain, provides the foundation and the framework for this study. Using this framework as an inspiration, the study provided a glimpse into whether self-efficacy correlates with second language achievement for Iranian newcomers.

An analysis of data on eight Iranian ESL participants enrolled in LINC 6-7 classes yielded some valuable findings regarding self-efficacy and second language achievement. Notably, it can be argued that the findings for the male participants demonstrate a positive relationship between self-efficacy and second language achievement. However, for the female participants, the results contradict the argument of this paper, regarding the hypothesized positive correlation between self-efficacy beliefs and SLA.

Aside from investigating the relationship between self-efficacy and SLA, the second main theme was to further investigate whether gender influences the degree of self-efficacy a second language learner might possess. Overall, the study did not find a substantial gender difference dimension when discussing the self-efficacy of second language learners.

The third theme discussed in this research paper is investigating the role of cultural upbringing in Iranian second language learners. The findings reaffirmed other scholars' arguments (Pishghadam and Zabihi, 2011; Brown *et al.*, 2005; Smith and Bond, 1998) regarding the fact that Iranian collectivist culture might have contributed to how language learners make more effort attributions to their language success or failure.

Given that there were only eight respondents, this study contributes to the growing literature in this area, and both points to the limitations of the study, and opens up new questions. Consequently, this paper expands on the current body of literature on the resettlement of second language learners, but also provides new perspectives for future research.

The first area of future research identified in this study is doing extensive research recruiting a high number of participants from diverse ethnic communities in order to gain a better and accurate comparative understanding as to how culture can influence the self-efficacy of second language learners. A possible area of research is a comparative analysis of self-efficacy beliefs in collectivist versus individualistic cultures.

The second area of future research is exploring how the socio-economic status of research participants might significantly impact their second language proficiency, as to whether they might have had more or less prior opportunities of exposure to a second language. Therefore future research can be conducted on how ESL learners' socio-economic status can influence self-efficacy formation, and influence gender differences in their experience of learning a second language.

Appendices

Appendix A:

Self-efficacy Questionnaire-English

Please read the following questions and choose one of the 5 options. There are no wrong answers.

1. English is…

1) a very difficult language 2) a difficult language 3) a language of medium difficulty 4) an easy language   5) a very easy language

2. It is important to speak English with excellent pronunciation.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

3. I shouldn't say anything in English unless I can say it correctly.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

4. It's okay to guess if I don't know a word in English.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

5. Intelligence and intellectual abilities are the main criteria for second language learning.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

6. Everyone can learn to speak and write English.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

7. If I learn English very well, I will have a good opportunity to get a decent job.
1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

8. No one cares or gives attention to my English learning improvement.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

9. Thanks to my self-esteem I know how to overcome unexpected and unwanted situations in my language learning process.
1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

10. I am one of the best students in our class.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

11. My English instructor thinks I am smart.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

12. My classmates usually get better grades than I do.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

13. Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

14. I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

15. I have a special ability for learning English.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

16. I can speak better than other students in class.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

17. When confronting problems in my speaking or writing tasks, I'm able to calm myself because I believe in my inner abilities.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

18. I am sure that if I practice more, I will get better grades in this course.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

19. If I put enough effort into it, I can always solve even the toughest speaking and writing English tasks.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

20. The more difficult the language task, the more challenging and enjoyable it is for me.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

21. Rank the four English language skills according to the level of difficulty:
(1 being the easiest skill and 4 being the hardest)
a)Reading …. b)Writing …. c) Speaking …. d) Listening ….

22. I enjoy practicing English with native speakers of English.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

23. I feel intimidated when speaking English with other people.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

24.When the instructor asks a question I raise my hand to answer, even if I am not sure about it being correct.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

25. I try to calm myself whenever I feel scared of speaking English.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

26. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

27. I am often tense or nervous when I am speaking or writing English.
1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neutral 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

28. Which of the following statements do you agree with?

1)Men are more proficient than women in speaking English.

2)Women are more proficient than men in speaking English.

3)Both men and women are equally skilled in speaking English.

4) I don't know.

Please answer the following questions. Please be assured that all the information will be confidential.

1) Name : _____
2) Are you: Female_____ Male_____
3) How old are you? _____ years old
4) What year did you come to Canada? _____

5) What are your beliefs about performing the following speaking and writing tasks that will be presented to you in this study?

I will perform excellent.
I will perform very well.
I will perform okay.
I will perform poorly.
I don't know.

6) Additional comments :
_____
_____
_____

Thank you for participating in this study.

50

Self-efficacy Questionnaire- Farsi

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پرسش نامه

قسمت۱
لطفا سوالات زير را به دقت بخوانيد و يکی از پنج گزينه را انتخاب کنيد. هيچ جوابي اشتباه نيست.

۱) زبان انگليسي از لحاظ يادگيري...
۱. زبان بسيار سختي است   ۲.زبان سختي است   ۳. زباني است با سختي متوسط ٤. زبان آساني است
٥. زبان بسيار آساني است

۲) براي من صحبت کردن زبان انگليسي با تلفظ عالي بسيار حائز اهميت است.
۱. خيلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خيلي مخالف

۳) تا جايي که مي شود نبايد به زبان انگليسي سخن گفت، مگر اينکه بتوان آن را بصورت صحيح ادا کرد.
۱. خيلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خيلي مخالف

٤) از نظر من، حدس زدن معناي کلمه ی انگليسي که نمي دانم ايرادي ندارد.
۱. خيلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خيلي مخالف

۵) داشتن هوش و خرد مهم ترين معيارهاي يادگيري زبان دوم هستند.
۱. خيلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خيلي مخالف

٦) همه افراد مي توانند صحبت کردن و نوشتن به يك زبان انگليسي را ياد بگيرند.
۱. خيلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خيلي مخالف

۷) ميدانم که اگر زبان انگليسي را خوب فرا بگيرم، يك شغل مناسب پيداخواهم کرد.
۱. خيلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خيلي مخالف

۸) هيچ کس به پيشرفت من در امر ياد گيري زبان انگليسي اهميتي نمي دهد.
۱. خيلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خيلي مخالف

۹) در طول فرايند يادگيري زبان انگليسي، بخاطر اعتماد به نفسي که به خود دارم، مي دانم چطور با موقعيتهای غيرقابل پيش بينی و ناخواسته روبه رو شوم.
۱. خيلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خيلي مخالف

</div>

۱۰) من یکي از بهترین زبان آموزان کلاسم هستم.
۱. خیلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خیلي مخالف

۱۱) معلم زبانم من را باهوش و زرنگ مي پندارد.
۱. خیلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خیلي مخالف

۱۲) همکلاسي هایم معمولا نمرات بهتري نسبت به من مي گیرند.
۱. خیلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خیلي مخالف

۱۳) برخي افراد استعداد ویژه براي یادگیري زبان انگلیسي دارند.
۱. خیلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خیلي مخالف

۱٤)من باور دارم که در نهایت، صحبت کردن به زبان انگلیسي را بسیار خوب یاد خواهم گرفت.
۱. خیلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خیلي مخالف

۱۵) من توانایي و استعداد ویژه اي براي یادگیري زبان انگلیسي دارم.
۱. خیلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خیلي مخالف

۱٦) نسبت به سایر زبان آموزان کلاس،من بهتر انگلیسي را صحبت مي کنم.
۱. خیلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خیلي مخالف

۱۷) در زمان برخورد با مشکل صحبت کردن یا نوشتن به زبان انگلیسي، می توانم خونسردی و آرامش خود را حفظ کنم، چون به توانایی درونی خود اعتماد دارم.
۱. خیلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خیلي مخالف

۱۸) من اطمینان دارم که با تمرین بیشتر نمرات بهتري در کلاس زبان انگلیسي خواهم گرفت.
۱. خیلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خیلي مخالف

۱۹) باور دارم که اگر به اندازه کافی تلاش کنم، همیشه قادر به حل سخت ترین تمرین هاي صحبت کردن و نوشتن به زبان انگلیسي خواهم بود.
۱. خیلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خیلي مخالف

۲۰) هر چه تمرین هاي زبان انگلیسي سخت تر و چالش انگیزتر باشد، براي من انجامشان لذت بخش تر خواهد بود.
۱. خیلي موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بي طرف ٤. مخالف ٥. خیلي مخالف

۲۱) چهار مهارت زبان انگلیسی را بر مبنای دشواری که دارند شماره گذاری نمایید:
(با در نظر گرفتن اینکه شماره ۱ آسان ترین مهارت و شماره۴ دشوارترین مهارت محسوب شوند)

الف) مهارت خواندن زبان انگلیسی

ب) مهارت نوشتن زبان انگلیسی

ج)مهارت صحبت کردن به زبان انگلیسی

هـ) مهارت گوش کردن و درک مطلب زبان انگلیسی

۲۲) من از مصاحبت با کسانی که زبان مادریشان انگلیسی است لذت می برم.
۱. خیلی موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بی طرف ۴. مخالف ۵. خیلی مخالف

۲۳) من از صحبت کردن به زبان انگلیسی با دیگران می ترسم.
۱. خیلی موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بی طرف ۴. مخالف ۵. خیلی مخالف

۲۴) هنگامی که معلم سوالی می پرسد، علی رغم اطمینان نداشتن به درستی جوابم، من مایل به پاسخ گویی هستم.
۱. خیلی موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بی طرف ۴. مخالف ۵. خیلی مخالف

۲۵) هر گاه از صحبت کردن زبان انگلیسی ترس پیدا می کنم، سعی می کنم آرامش خود را حفظ کنم.
۱. خیلی موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بی طرف ۴. مخالف ۵. خیلی مخالف

۲۶) با وجود ترس از اشتباه کردن؛ با این حال خودم را تشویق می کنم تا به انگلیسی صحبت بکنم.
۱. خیلی موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بی طرف ۴. مخالف ۵. خیلی مخالف

۲۷) هرگاه در حال صحبت کردن یا نوشتن به زبان انگلیسی هستم، دچار تشویش و نگرانی می شوم.
۱. خیلی موافق ۲.موافق ۳. بی طرف ۴. مخالف ۵. خیلی مخالف

۲۸) با کدام یک از جملات زیر بیشتر موافق هستید؟
۱) آقایان به نسبت خانم ها در صحبت کردن به زبان اگلیسی مهارت بیشتری دارند.
۲) خانم ها نسبت به آقایان در صحبت کردن به زبان اگلیسی مهارت بیشتری دارند.
۳) آقایان و خانم ها در صحبت کردن به زبان اگلیسی مهارت یکسانی دارند.
۴) نمی دانم

قسمت ۲)

لطفا به سوالات زیر پاسخ بدهید. از اینکه این اطلاعات محرمانه خواهند ماند اطمینان خاطر داشته باشید.

۱) نام _____

۲) خانم هستید یا آقا؟

۳) چند سال دارید؟

۴) چه سالي وارد کانادا شدید ؟ _____

۱) باور شما نسبت به عملکرد خودتان در آزمون امروز صحبت کردن و نوشتن زبان انگلیسي چگونه است ؟
۲) عملکرد من عالي خواهد بود.
۳) عملکرد من بسیار خوب خواهد بود.
٤) عملکرد من خوب خواهد بود.
٥) عملکرد من ضعیف خواهد بود.
٦) نمي دانم.

۵) نظرات و حرف هايي که دارید:
_____
_____
_____
_____

از اینکه در پژوهش من شرکت کردید کمال تشکر را دارم.

Appendix B:

LINC 6-7 Speaking and Writing

Speaking

In Questions 1 and 2 you will be asked to give an opinion or explanation related to a familiar topic.

Read the questions. You are free to choose one of the following questions. Take notes on the main points of your response. Then, respond to the question.

Preparation time: 30 seconds. Response time: 2 minutes

1. If you could go back to some time and place in the past, when and where would you go? Why? Use specific reasons and details to support your choice.

2.Some people prefer to live in a small town. Others prefer to live in a big city. Which place would you prefer to live in? Why? Use specific reasons and details to support your choice.

Writing

For this task, you will be asked to write an essay in which you state, explain, and support your opinion on an issue. You will have 15 minutes to complete your essay.

Which would you choose: a high-paying job with long hours that would give you little time with family and friends or a lower-paying job with shorter hours that would give you more time with family and friends? Explain your choice, using specific reasons and details.

Appendix C:

CLB Assessment Report

Understanding your Canadian Language Benchmarks Placement Test (CLBPT) Assessment Report

STAGE II: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY

CLB	Listening	CLB	Speaking	CLB	Reading	CLB	Writing
5	You understand many words and phrases about familiar topics spoken at a normal speed. You also understand some indirect meanings when people talk about familiar topics. You usually don't need help understanding when someone speaks to you, but sometimes you misunderstand what they say.	5	You speak about your personal experiences and describe your likes and dislikes independently. You are beginning to use longer sentences and make clear suggestions and comparisons. You know a lot of common words and some idioms. Sometimes you hesitate or pause. People occasionally have difficulty understanding you when you speak.	5	You understand many familiar and unfamiliar words. You get the main ideas, some details and some indirect meaning in descriptions of somewhat familiar topics. You are beginning to get information from longer, more difficult texts.	5	You describe an event in a paragraph with a clear main idea and some supporting details. You also describe your ideas in some detail or give your opinion. Although you make some mistakes, your sentences show good control of simple grammar, spelling, punctuation and vocabulary.
6	You understand many common words, some less familiar ones, and some idioms. You understand the important details and indirect meanings when someone speaks about familiar topics. You also recognize some details about the speaker's attitude and opinions. You have no trouble understanding someone when they speak to you.	6	You speak about facts and ideas in some detail. You use different grammatical structures and connect your ideas into longer sentences. Your vocabulary is growing and you use some idioms. Although you make mistakes, people don't usually have trouble understanding you. You are reasonably fluent.	6	You understand short texts written in plain English that are a little difficult. You get the main idea, key details and some indirect meanings. You are beginning to understand the writer's purpose, intent and attitude. You get some main points and details from longer, more difficult texts.	6	You describe or compare events, people, places, objects and routines in a paragraph format. You also express an idea or an opinion clearly and include some details to support it. Your simple sentences have only a few errors in spelling, punctuation and vocabulary. You are beginning to use advanced grammar and vocabulary.
7	You understand more difficult, indirect questions about personal experience, familiar topics and general knowledge. You also understand the main points, important details and indirect meanings when someone talks about more abstract ideas. Your vocabulary is expanding and you know more idioms. You have no trouble understanding conversations on familiar topics.	7	You speak comfortably about many different topics. You describe people, places and situations as well as express your opinions, feelings and reservations about a topic. You make detailed comparisons. You are starting to use advanced vocabulary, including many idioms. You make some grammatical mistakes but people can easily understand you. You are reasonably fluent.	7	You understand texts written in plain English that are long and a little difficult. You find and integrate different ideas in the text, or compare and contrast information. You understand texts that deal with facts, opinions and feelings. You get the main points and some details from longer, more difficult texts.	7	You write short paragraphs about familiar, concrete topics and include clear main ideas and some supporting details. You can write a short essay with an appropriate introduction and conclusion. You have fairly good control over grammar, spelling and sentence mechanics. You use advanced vocabulary and grammar, but sometimes your sentences may sound unusual or awkward.
8	You understand many difficult, indirect questions about personal experience, familiar topics and general knowledge. You also understand main points, details, purpose and attitude when others talk about familiar topics as well as abstract and complex ideas. You understand many idioms and expressions and can follow conversations and detailed stories of general interest.	8	You speak comfortably about a range of both familiar and less familiar topics. You provide descriptions, express opinions, and give explanations. You analyze and compare information in order to recommend solutions to a problem. You use advanced vocabulary, including idioms. Your message is clear and rarely interrupted by errors. People rarely have trouble understanding you. You are reasonably fluent.	8	You follow main ideas, key words and important details in texts written in plain English that are long and a little difficult. You find and integrate information across paragraphs. You understand indirect meanings, and the writer's intention in texts about more abstract and conceptual topics. You may sometimes find it difficult to understand some idioms or cultural references in more advanced texts.	8	You express ideas and opinions about familiar or abstract topics in short paragraphs. You link sentences and provide support for the main ideas in a short essay. You have good control over common sentence patterns, grammar and spelling. You use advanced vocabulary and grammar. Occasionally you have difficulty with complex grammar and style, but your message is easy to understand.

For more information, visit: www.language.ca

CLB Speaking Evaluation Criteria

SPEAKING	**STAGE II**	**EVALUATION**	

Performance monitoring, evaluation and the Benchmark achievement report

Learner performance is first evaluated globally for its functional effectiveness. Effectiveness is an overall holistic evaluation of the speaker's success in communicating as required by the task. It describes whether the global purpose of communication has been achieved.

Then, learner performance is evaluated analytically for some "qualitative" aspects of the communication. The analytic criteria will differ according to the situation of language use. The instructors will select

criteria relating to the Benchmark level and to the nature of the task and its requirements. For example, in using greetings and courtesy formulas, the relevant criteria are appropriateness and intelligibility. Other speaking tasks may require the criteria of accuracy (e.g., grammar, vocabulary), relevance, fluency, etc.

The following chart reflects the CLB considerations of the "combined" evaluation of speaking performance.

Assessment type	Criteria to consider	Ratings: Levels of Performance	Suggested weight
Holistic	• Overall effectiveness	1 2 3 4	30%
Analytic	For monologic-type tasks, choose: • Accuracy of grammar • Adequacy of vocabulary for purpose • Intelligibility of speech • Appropriateness • Organization of discourse/coherence • Fluency • Relevance and adequacy of content For interactional tasks, add: • Conversation management • Negotiation of meaning	1 2 3 4	70%
Combined			100%

Satisfactory performance (a pass) in a Benchmark competency is represented as mark (rating level) 3.

Monitoring, evaluating and reporting Benchmark achievement

Benchmark achievement report:	Ratings	Ratings for levels of performance:
❏ Social interaction	_____	1 - unable to achieve yet
❏ Instructions	_____	2 - needs help
❏ Suasion (getting things done)	_____	3 - satisfactory Benchmark achievement: pass
❏ Information	_____	4 - more than satisfactory achievement

Learners must achieve all competency objectives to obtain the benchmark credential.

Canadian Language Benchmarks www.language.ca

CLB Writing Evaluation Criteria

Performance monitoring, evaluation and the Benchmark achievement report

Learner performance is first evaluated globally for its functional effectiveness. Effectiveness is an overall holistic evaluation of the writer's success in communicating as required by the task. It describes whether the global purpose of communication has been achieved.

Learner performance is then evaluated analytically for some "qualitative" aspects of the communication. The analytic criteria will differ according to the situation of language use. The instructors will select criteria appropriate to the Benchmark level and to the nature of the

task and its requirements. For example, filling a form with personal information may not involve the criteria of text organization and cohesion; the relevant criteria may include overall effectiveness (e.g., reader can use the information as intended), legibility/mechanics, relevance of content.

The following chart reflects the CLB considerations of the "combined" evaluation of writing performance.

Assessment type	Criteria to consider	Ratings: Levels of Performance	Suggested weight
Holistic	• Overall effectiveness	1 2 3 4	30%
Analytic	• Accuracy of grammar • Adequacy of vocabulary for purpose • Cohesion • Organization of text • Appropriateness of text (style, register, layout, visual presentation) • Legibility/mechanics (handwriting, spelling, punctuation) • Relevance, factual accuracy and adequacy of content	1 2 3 4	70%
Combined			100%

Satisfactory performance (a pass) in a Benchmark competency is represented as mark (rating level) 3.

Monitoring, evaluating and reporting Benchmark achievement

Benchmark achievement report:	Ratings	Ratings for levels of performance:
❑ Social interaction	_____	1 - unable to achieve yet
❑ Reproducing information	_____	2 - needs help
❑ Business/service messages	_____	3 - satisfactory Benchmark achievement: pass
❑ Presenting information/ideas	_____	4 - more than satisfactory achievement

Learners must achieve all competency objectives to obtain the benchmark credential.

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