

Examining the relationship between language proficiency and self-efficacy among Cypriot teachers of English as a foreign language

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ABSTRACT

The field of English language teaching (ELT) has undergone significant changes in the 21st century, evolving into a Lingua Franca and supplanting French as an official diplomatic language. The concept and practice of ELT have shed light on factors affecting the self-efficacy of EFL teachers. The objective of this study was to evaluate the impact of language proficiency on the self-efficacy of non-native English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Northern Cyprus. This study utilized a mixed-method approach incorporating the Foreign Language Learning Anxiety scale as a theoretical framework and conducting interviews on teaching self-efficacy. The study was carried out utilizing online questionnaires and interviews and garnered responses from 45 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators, 12 of whom participated in the interviews. According to the study, the self-efficacy of EFL Cypriot teachers in ELT is impacted by their level of English language proficiency. Additionally, they demonstrate a favorable understanding of the relationship between language proficiency, self-efficacy, and ELT. The study revealed that misconceptions regarding attaining native-level proficiency have a detrimental impact on the confidence and anxiety levels of non-native educators. This emphasizes the necessity for professional development initiatives and inclusive educational policies to bolster teacher self-assurance and accommodate diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Introduction: Background of English as a foreign language teachers from Cyprus

The English language achieved widespread acceptance due to the influential diplomatic endeavors of English-speaking nations following the conclusion of the Second World War, particularly regarding the establishment and administration of the United Nations diplomatic and political institution (United Nations, 2020). Additionally, as stated by Lee & Paine (2019),

numerous nations chose to adopt English as a Lingua Franca in the aftermath of the war to avoid potential political complexities associated with favoring one native dialect over another (Sorensen, Young & Pedersen, 2019).

The exploration of ELT's transaction can delve deeper into the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), considering the significance of the aforementioned development of English as a Lingua Franca (Kemala & Bukit, 2022). The emergence of English as a global lingua franca has significantly influenced the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly in non-native contexts, such as Northern Cyprus. This study selects Northern Cyprus as its research context to analyze this transaction within an EFL context.

In the contemporary context, English functions as a crucial lingua franca in Northern Cyprus, especially within educational settings (Essen, 2012). The adoption of English as the primary language for diplomacy and international communication post-World War II has influenced its integration into the educational system of Northern Cyprus (Jackson, 2019). This relevance is reflected in the compulsory EFL mandates and the structured teacher education programs designed to enhance English proficiency among educators (Mehtiyev, 2010). As a result, understanding the dynamics of English proficiency and its impact on teacher self-efficacy is essential for developing effective ELT practices in this region (Kibler & Valdés, 2016). This study, therefore, provides timely insights into improving EFL teaching by addressing the proficiency and self-efficacy of teachers within this unique linguistic landscape.

According to Dolunay & Kasap (2020) and Essen (2012), Northern Cyprus has been established as a de facto nation, with ties to the Republic of Turkey, since 1974. As a result, the education system in Northern Cyprus adheres to the regulations set forth by the Department of Education of the Republic of Turkey. This entails the incorporation of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the curriculum, emphasizing the significance of language proficiency for educators. Consequently, this study serves as a distinctive endeavor to investigate the direct implications of language proficiency on self-efficacy among EFL teachers in Cyprus, an area of research that has been significantly neglected in previous scholarly literature.

Based on the findings of the Eurobarometer (2020), the percentage of English speakers in Cyprus stands at 76%. As a result, the Department of Education in Northern Cyprus has enforced a compulsory English as a Foreign Language (EFL) mandate in the education system. Ufuk & Caganaga (2019) emphasize the significance of enhancing the spoken English abilities of Cypriot EFL instructors. The Department of Education has implemented regulations and guidelines to provide Cypriot EFL teachers with the necessary skills. These regulations cover teacher education programs that offer Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD degrees in ELT. By completing these programs, ELT graduates can attain certified teacher status for English instruction (Kourieos & Diakou, 2019).

The existing English Language Teaching (ELT) programs in Northern Cyprus are founded upon Selinker's (1972) concepts of initial interlanguage and subsequent fossilization. Therefore, Cypriot EFL teachers might be inclined to acknowledge that their first language undermines their English proficiency as EFL teachers due to their training programs.

A study conducted by Kunt & Tum (2010) investigated the experience of foreign language anxiety among Cypriot EFL teacher trainees in Northern Cyprus. It has been discovered that the conduct and involvement of native English speakers in the classroom generate an atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty. Additionally, the research showcased the impact of Selinker's (1972) interlanguage principles on the self-efficacy of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators in Cyprus. Previous research conducted in Northern Cyprus (Salihoglu & Gurkan, 2016; Erkmen,

2010), exclusively examined English Language Teaching (ELT) self-efficacy, specifically pertaining to teachers' abilities and accomplishments in facilitating effective learning. In line with Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, we have embraced the belief that the language instructors' job performance can be influenced by their perceptions of self-efficacy, as well as their language proficiency (Lucito, 2020). The current study examined the impact of language proficiency on the self-efficacy of non-native English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Cyprus.

The previous studies discussed above have not adequately explored the specific impact of language proficiency on the self-efficacy of non-native EFL teachers in Northern Cyprus. While previous research by Kunt & Tum (2010) primarily examined foreign language anxiety in teacher trainees, it did not extensively explore the direct impact of language proficiency on teaching self-efficacy. Likewise, the research conducted by Salihoglu & Gurkan (2016) and Erkmén (2010) focused on self-efficacy in teaching skills, yet they did not delve into the intricate connection between proficiency levels and self-efficacy.

This study further investigates Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory discussed earlier, which posits that self-efficacy influences job performance. This study adds to the current body of literature by exploring this concept specifically in the distinct context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in Northern Cyprus. The upcoming results and discussion delve into the findings that not only support but also build upon the research conducted by Kunt & Tum (2010). These findings provide insight into how language anxiety and proficiency affect teachers' self-efficacy. This study presents a comprehensive examination of how professional development, and educational policies can effectively tackle these issues, promoting initiatives that bolster teacher confidence and cater to a range of linguistic backgrounds.

Method

The study was carried out online and obtained ethical approval from both the ethics panel and course leader on June 20, 2020. The participants were provided with detailed information regarding the objectives and procedures of the study and were obligated to give informed consent, thereby confirming their voluntary participation and right to withdraw until the study's completion on October 15, 2020. It should be emphasized that there were no withdrawals from the study. Rigorous measures were consistently implemented to safeguard the confidentiality of participant information. The implemented measures encompassed data anonymization and secure storage of collected data through the utilization of Google Forms (Ivins, 2016). Google Forms employs the use of "HyperText Transfer Protocol Secure (HTTPS)" to ensure the encryption of data exchanged between users' browsers and Google servers. The encryption method employed ensures the protection of participant responses and safeguards against unauthorized access during transmission (Smith & Mader, 2015).

This study utilized a mixed-method approach and encompassed the timeframe of July 1, 2020, to October 15, 2020, as previously stated. The methodology involved the distribution of a quantitative questionnaire to collect numerical data, along with the conduction of qualitative semi-structured interviews to further explore participants' experiences and perspectives. The mixed-method design was selected due to its capacity to provide a comprehensive comprehension of the observed correlations between language proficiency, anxiety frameworks, and self-efficacy among EFL teachers in Northern Cyprus. This study aimed to provide comprehensive insights into the intricate dynamics that influence EFL teaching practices and

teacher perceptions in this specific context, achieved through adhering to ethical guidelines, maintaining participant confidentiality, and utilizing a rigorous mixed-method methodology.

The study was conducted on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Northern Cyprus, all of whom were of Cypriot nationality. The study utilized the Foreign Language Learning Anxiety scale to evaluate anxiety levels (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986), and conducted semi-structured interviews to obtain qualitative insights into teaching self-efficacy. The Foreign Language Learning Anxiety scale is a reputable measure that is utilized to gauge the anxiety levels of individuals who are in the process of acquiring a foreign language. It evaluates multiple contributing factors to language learning anxiety, including communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Onwuegbuzie, Bailey & Daley, 2000). The present study utilized the Foreign Language Learning Anxiety scale to assess the anxiety levels of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, establishing a foundation for investigating the correlation between anxiety, language proficiency, and self-efficacy. The importance of the Foreign Language Learning Anxiety scale stems from its capability to emphasize the psychological hurdles that non-native EFL teachers in Northern Cyprus encounter, thereby providing insights for devising effective strategies to address these concerns (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).

As a result, data collection was divided into two distinct phases. The initial stage of the study involved the administration of questionnaires. The survey asked EFL teachers to provide information on their demographics, including age, gender, mother tongue, highest level of education completed, and employment status. The survey also included 25 questions investigating EFL teachers' experiences teaching English with an ESL background. Participants provided responses on a 5-item Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree."

In the second phase of this study, participants provided their responses to a series of 10 interview questions related to teaching self-efficacy. The interviews were conducted by means of Microsoft Teams, a video-conferencing application (Martin & Tapp, 2019). The interview questions provide further insight into the responses related to the case study in the questionnaire's second section. As an illustration, a question in the questionnaire inquired: "In the scenario where a native English speaker corrects your pronunciation of an English word and mocks you, what course of action would you take?"

As previously mentioned, the questionnaires were distributed through Google Forms and sent to participants via email. The study recruited participants from the ELT Cyprus forum group on Facebook, a popular social media platform, and obtained their email addresses to ensure a formal approach. The participants were provided with a detailed email containing comprehensive information about the study, along with a voluntary invitation to participate and links to questionnaires in the format of Google Forms.

The selection of interview participants from the pool of questionnaire respondents involved a strategic process to ensure a representative sample of Cypriot EFL teacher trainees in Northern Cyprus. After the quantitative data collection phase, participants who completed the questionnaire were asked if they were willing to participate in follow-up interviews. Those who expressed interest were then screened based on specific criteria to ensure diversity and relevance.

The criteria included the following elements. To ensure a comprehensive representation, demographic factors such as age, gender, mother tongue, highest level of education, and teaching experience were extensively documented in the results and discussion section (Goossens, Olthof, & Dekker, 2006). Selecting participants whose questionnaire responses provided valuable and varied insights, particularly in relation to teaching self-efficacy, language proficiency, and anxiety.

Ensuring participants' confirmation of their willingness and availability for the semi-structured interviews (Nielsen, 2001).

Data analysis

The interviews and open-ended questions from the questionnaire underwent qualitative analysis, with themes identified through thematic coding of responses. These themes encompassed teacher self-efficacy, as well as language proficiency, including both native and non-native stereotypes. The analysis involved the utilization of NVivo version 12 software on a computer, employing the themes and Language Learning Anxiety scale as a theoretical framework (Escobar, Munoz & Silva Velandia, 2019). The demographic information and responses to the Likert scale questions obtained from the questionnaire on Google Forms were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26, a computer-based program. The results were then presented as frequencies and percentages. The subsequent paragraphs will delve deeper into the process of thematic coding mentioned earlier, encompassing the reliability and validity of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses was subjected to thematic coding for analysis. The process involved a series of steps that were analyzed using Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method, as outlined in the subsequent steps.

Step 1: Transcription

Verbatim transcriptions were created for all interviews conducted using Microsoft Teams to guarantee precision.

Step 2: Initial coding

The transcriptions and open-ended responses were examined, and initial codes were assigned to segments of text using NVivo version 12 software. The codes served as representations of important concepts and recurring patterns derived from the data.

Step 3: Identification of themes

The initial codes were analyzed in order to identify overarching themes. The theoretical framework provided by the Language Learning Anxiety scale identified themes, including teacher self-efficacy, language proficiency, native and non-native stereotypes, and language learning anxiety.

Step 4: Review and refinement

The identified themes underwent a thorough review and refinement process to ensure their accurate representation of the data. This process entailed the merging of interconnected themes, the division of intricate themes, and the elimination of redundant or irrelevant codes.

Step 5: Reporting

The conclusive themes were reported and substantiated with representative quotes extracted from the interviews and open-ended responses, serving as evidence for the findings.

Additionally, the quantitative analysis was conducted with a focus on ensuring reliability and validity, which involved the use of established instruments with high reliability scores, including the 5-item Likert scale for the assessment of EFL teachers' experiences. The reliability of Likert scales, in terms of item content, hinges on the clarity and conciseness of statements (Bartlett & Frost, 2008). It is crucial to ensure that every item on the Likert scale is expressed with clarity and directly connected to the construct being assessed. Moreover, the assurance of reliability is

achieved by incorporating balanced statements that encompass both positive and negative wording in order to mitigate response bias. Both aspects are adhered to by the current study (Zohrabi, 2013).

Furthermore, to ensure content validity, experts in the field of EFL education extensively examined the questionnaire items. The assessment of construct validity involved comparing the questionnaire results with theoretical predictions and previous research findings, as demonstrated in the forthcoming results and discussion section.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the qualitative analysis, we engaged multiple coders in the thematic coding process. The assessment of inter-coder reliability involved two researchers from this study independently coding a subset of the data and subsequently comparing their results (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Discrepancies were thoroughly deliberated and resolved to reach a consensus. The data obtained from interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses were analyzed to identify coherent patterns and themes (Abowitz & Toole, 2010).

Through the strict implementation of these rigorous approaches, the study sought to establish a strong and all-encompassing comprehension of the correlation between language proficiency, anxiety, and self-efficacy among EFL teachers in Northern Cyprus. This will be further examined in the subsequent section dedicated to results.

Results and discussion

A total of 45 participants responded to the questionnaire, and 12 individuals were selected for interviews. Among the participants, the majority, 60%, identified as female, while 37.8% identified as male, and a small percentage, 2.2%, opted not to specify their gender as male or female. The largest segment of participants, accounting for 60% of the total, belonged to the age range of 25-34 years. Following that, a demographic comprising individuals aged 18 to 24 made up 22.2% of the participants. The percentage of participants aged 45 and above was 11.1%, whereas those between 35 and 44 accounted for 6.7%. Individuals from Northern Cyprus (44.4%) constituted the largest proportion of participants, followed by British nationals (26.75%) and Turkish nationals (15.65%). The remaining ethnicities consisting of Iraqi (2.2%), Arabic (2.2%), Pakistani (2.2%), Russian (2.2%), Iranian (2.2%), and Azerbaijani (2.2%).

Among the participants, the Turkish language stood out as the predominant native language, making up 57.8% of the group, while English accounted for 20%. Among the other native languages spoken were Greek (4.4%), Kurdish (4.4%), a combination of English and Turkish (2.2%), Persian (2.2%), Urdu (2.2%), Russian (2.2%), Arabic (2.2%), and Azerbaijani (2.2%). The wide variety of spoken languages among the participants underscores the notion of English as a *Lingua Franca*, serving as a "link language" for individuals who do not share a common national language or native culture, and for whom English is the designated foreign language for communication.

Many participants held a bachelor's degree in ELT (48.9%), followed by those with a master's degree. Moreover, many participants (26.7%) were not employed during the period of this study. The range of unemployed ELT graduates and those employed in primary and secondary schools showed a limited variation, with a minimal difference of 2.3%. In light of the aforementioned demographical analysis, the impact of demographic variables on self-efficacy and language proficiency is presented below, with a particular emphasis on age, gender, and native language.

The influence of age on both self-efficacy and language proficiency is considerable. It is possible that individuals in the younger adult demographic, particularly those aged 18-24, exhibit superior language learning capabilities attributed to cognitive flexibility and improved memory retention

(Klein *et al.*, 2014; Bandura, 1993). Nevertheless, younger individuals may exhibit diminished levels of self-efficacy in contrast to their older peers, who frequently possess greater expertise and assurance (Oxley & de Cat, 2021). A significant proportion of the study participants (60%) fell within the age range of 25-34, a phase commonly associated with professional growth and established self-identity. The language proficiency of this particular age group may be positively impacted by their career experiences and maturity, which could result in higher self-efficacy (Hoxha & Sumner, 2021).

Numerous studies (for example, Liyanage & Bartlett, 2012; Yim & Norton, 2001) have examined gender disparities in language learning and self-efficacy, consistently indicating that females tend to display elevated levels of self-efficacy and motivation within language learning environments (Faruk & Saha, 2016). Within this study, a majority of 60% of the participants identified themselves as female. The demographic makeup of the participants may have an impact on the results, potentially leading to higher self-efficacy and improved language proficiency outcomes. This phenomenon arises from the observation that female learners often exhibit elevated levels of motivation. The male representation accounted for 37.8%, with a small percentage (2.2%) of respondents choosing not to specify their gender, which could contribute to a more nuanced comprehension of gender effects on language acquisition.

The role of the native language in acquiring proficiency in a second language cannot be overstated. The majority of participants in this study primarily communicated in Turkish (57.8%), while English was the second most prevalent native language (20%). The inclusion of various native languages, such as Greek, Kurdish, Persian, and Urdu, among the participants signifies a diverse linguistic heritage, potentially impacting language proficiency. Individuals whose native languages exhibit greater linguistic similarity with English may experience increased ease in attaining proficiency, thus positively impacting their self-efficacy (Moussu & Llorca, 2008). On the other hand, individuals with limited linguistic resemblance to English may encounter greater difficulties, which could potentially diminish their self-confidence (Evans & Levinson, 2009).

The theme of teaching self-efficacy emerged in the questionnaire and interview results of this study, particularly in response to the question: "In general, do you believe that self-efficacy impacts English language teaching (ELT) teachers with an English as a Second Language (ESL) background?"

(1) *"Yes, in terms of speaking, as sometimes even I feel different when speaking to pure native speakers."* (Participant with minimum 5 years of ELT experience)

(2) *"Yes, I think it pronunciation-wise they do and as I have, I love the British accent. Therefore, I think pronunciation is an important self-efficacy."* (Participant with no prior ELT experience)

(3) *"Alright, I believe that self-efficacy affects everyone. I don't think one honest person can say they have never doubted themselves. And for me, based on my experience, I think the biggest self-efficacy is the native impact on non-native ideology. As long as there is a hierarchy associated with native hiring over non-native, there will always be a self-efficacy based on origins of mother tongue."* (Participant with maximum 6 years of ELT experience)

(4) *"I believe everyone is different. It is important to love teaching and again gain experience with English knowledge."* (Participant with a minimum 1 year of ELT experience)

These responses are consistent with the current research adaptation of the teacher self-efficacy concept, specifically regarding teachers' confidence in their competence to facilitate learning, as defined by Bandura (1986).

Table 1 presents a comprehensive analysis of the responses to significant survey inquiries, emphasizing the occurrence of imposter syndrome and anxiety within the participants. The data in Table 1 demonstrates that a large portion of participants maintained a neutral viewpoint when it came to perceptions of "imposter" qualities in relation to the statement: *"I experience a sense of impostor syndrome whenever I enter my classroom as an English teacher with a background in ESL."* On the other hand, most participants (28.9%) disagreed with the statement, *"I started to develop a degree of anxiety ever since I started teaching English with an ESL background."* These findings align with the assertion made by Bandura (1986) regarding the significance of cultivating self-efficacy through instruction. Bandura suggests that teachers' actions and words within their classrooms are influenced by their self-perception and competence in both personal and pedagogical domains. Additionally, Tum (2012) posited that there exists a reciprocal relationship between EFL teachers' self-efficacy and language anxiety, whereby one influences the other.

Table 1 English as a foreign language teachers' experience (N=45)

Statement	Strongly Agree N (%)	Agree N (%)	Neutral N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Strongly Disagree N (%)
I experience a sense of impostor syndrome whenever I enter my classroom as an English teacher with a background in ESL.	N=6 (13.3%)	N=8 (17.8%)	N=14 (31.1%)	N=9 (20.0%)	N=8 (17.8%)
Ever since I began teaching English with an ESL background, I have experienced a growing sense of anxiety.	N=8 (17.8%)	N=8 (17.8%)	N=10 (22.2%)	N=13 (28.9%)	N=6 (13.3%)
Throughout my higher education courses, I have consistently possessed the confidence to teach English despite my ESL background.	N=9 (20.0%)	N=11 (24.4%)	N=10 (22.2%)	N=13 (28.9%)	N=2 (4.4%)
I have a deep sense of pride in my role as an English teacher, particularly considering my ESL background.	N=18 (40.0%)	N=18 (40.0%)	N=8 (17.8%)	N=1 (2.2%)	N=0 (0.0%)

The interview questions further emphasize the concepts of self-efficacy, in line with the arguments put forth by Tum (2012) and Bandura (1986):

Question 1: *"How do you feel about your career as an ELT teacher?"* to which participants replied:

(1) *"It has always been my passion to be an English teacher, I really wanted to go into this life. So, I am very happy."* (Participant with 3-5 years of experience in ELT)

(2) *"I work in a special education primary school and it's rewarding and challenging at the same time. I constantly have to research new methods, but I love my career and helping the children."* (Participant with 1-2 years of experience)

Question 2: *"Do you see any differences between your first day of teaching and now, in the sense of emotions, for example, excitement or nervous?"* To which they replied:

(1) *"Of course, everyone has first-day butterflies; for example, in my first year, I taught English in Dubai, it was a wonderful experience. All my students were eager about my British accent. Therefore, I was*

excited to teach them because they were very motivated and fascinated with my British culture and accent." (Participant with 3-5 years of experience in ELT)

(2) *"Yes, I believe lesson planning is one type, as many people panic when they don't lesson plan. However, I wouldn't panic because I have many experiences with this situation. I can create a new lesson plan in the instant. I can do something different which worked for my students before."* (Participant with 1-2 years of experience)

It has been shown that there is a relationship between teaching experience and teacher "effectiveness" in terms of teacher's confidence (for example, Burroughs *et al.*, 2019; Zhang & Zhu, 2008). This study findings showed a discrepancy between participants based on their confidence in teaching English with an ESL background where participants differed with a minimum percentage difference in being neutral, agreeing, and disagreeing with the statement *"I have always been confident in teaching English with an ESL background since my higher education courses."* (Table 1). This relationship between teaching experience and teacher's "effectiveness" in terms of teacher confidence is further highlighted in the interview question: *"Do you think that gaining more than one degree in the field of English language teaching is relevant to a teacher's confidence in ELT with an ESL background?"* to which participants responded:

(1) *"Yes, I agree because as I have said, the more literature you learn, the more confident you become, even this is the reason I studied masters."* (Participant with 3-5 years of experience in ELT)

(2) *"Yes, totally experience is everything. I learned a lot from my colleague who is a master's graduate. I believe if I follow her road, I will be more effective in teaching."* (Participant with 1-2 years of experience in ELT)

On the other hand, we found equality in response rate (40%) between agree and strongly agree participants' responses to the statement: *"I feel very proud of myself as an English teacher coming from an ESL background."* This result is consistent with Wyatt's (2013) argument that teacher self-efficacy is related to teacher attrition (proudness) as well as with teaching skills. Additionally, the link between teacher attrition (proudness) and knowledge in terms of self-efficacy is further acknowledged in the interview question *"While undertaking your teaching degree, did your lecturers' perception of your teaching skills impact the teacher you are today/will be?"* Most of the participants responded to this question by agreeing that their attrition within their higher education courses impacted their self-efficacy as EFL teachers. Some participants replied:

(1) *"Yes, it did, as their remarks, positive and negative, made me the teacher I am today."* (Participant with over 6 years of experience).

(2) *"Starting with my bachelor to current, many of my teachers influenced me during all these years, I also admire some of my teachers teaching style/methods, and they are the ones who gave me the confidence the most towards teaching."* (Participant with 0 years of ELT experience).

The results of this current study indicate that Cypriot EFL teachers experience the influence of their self-efficacy on their teaching practices. The researchers found that the perception of foreign language learning as self-efficacy significantly impacts EFL teachers in Northern Cyprus, as noted in the present study by Yassin & Razak (2018).

This is further supported by this study's findings showing that there is a lingering confusion among participants from various experiential backgrounds in teaching when it comes to self-efficacy, as shown by their responses to the statement: *"I have always been confident in teaching English with an ESL background since my higher education courses,"* where there were no significant percentage differences in responses showing a discrepancy in participants' confidence in teaching English with an ESL background. Furthermore, given the prevailing ambiguity surrounding self-

efficacy among Cypriot EFL educators, the primary determinant rests on the concept that both teaching experience and language proficiency impact on the perceptions of EFL teachers' self-efficacy.

Based on participants' responses: *"I believe everyone is different. It is important to love teaching and again gain experience with English knowledge."* (Participant with minimum 2 years of ELT experience) and *"Yes in terms of speaking, as sometimes even I feel different when speaking to pure native speakers"* (Participant with 3-5 years of ELT experience). This study showed that Cypriot EFL teachers had a good perception of the impact of language proficiency and self-efficacy on their practices.

Furthermore, the conclusions drawn from this study are in accordance with Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which asserts that self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their capacity to succeed in specific situations, plays a pivotal role in shaping the approach to goals, tasks, and challenges. Within the confines of this study, a higher level of language proficiency among non-native EFL teachers contributes to the improvement of their self-efficacy. This notable increase in self-efficacy holds great importance as it enhances teachers' confidence levels, positively shaping both their instructional approaches and classroom management capabilities (Wyatt, 2018; Salihoglu & Gurkan, 2016). Therefore, the enhancement of self-efficacy can yield superior teaching outcomes, as educators are more prone to implementing effective teaching strategies, engaging more confidently with students, and fostering a more positive learning environment (Kemala & Bukit, 2022). This highlights the significance of providing assistance to non-native EFL teachers in enhancing their language proficiency, which in turn promotes their professional growth and ultimately improves the standard of English language education (Kourieos & Diakou, 2019).

In brief, the study highlighted the pivotal role of language proficiency in shaping the self-efficacy of EFL teachers. The study specifically indicated that EFL teachers who possess higher language proficiency levels exhibited significantly higher self-confidence and experienced reduced anxiety in their professional capacities. The connection between heightened confidence and decreased anxiety was observed to be directly associated with an elevated level of teaching effectiveness. This implies that the educator's proficiency in the language being taught is a fundamental factor in shaping their overall performance and influence within the classroom.

Additionally, the study's qualitative data offered profound insights into the experiences and perceptions of EFL teachers. Among the noteworthy discoveries was the adverse impact of misconceptions regarding native-level fluency. Numerous educators experienced unwarranted pressure to achieve a nearly native or native-level proficiency in English, resulting in unrealistic demands and increased anxiety. These misconceptions not only had a negative impact on teachers' self-efficacy but also hindered their teaching efficiency and job satisfaction.

Finally, it is important to note that the study is constrained by several limitations, including a small sample size that may not adequately represent EFL teachers in Northern Cyprus. The researchers were only able to conduct interviews with 12 participants out of the 45 who completed the questionnaire. The researcher was unable to consider the number of native English speakers working as teachers in Northern Cyprus, which could potentially influence the perception of Cypriot EFL teachers regarding the impact of their self-efficacy in comparison to native teachers. As a result of the precautionary measures implemented to combat COVID-19, this study was conducted remotely, potentially introducing selection bias. Furthermore, while the small sample size and remote nature of data collection due to COVID-19 could introduce selection bias, affecting the generalizability of the results, it is also important to consider the strengths of this approach (Atilgan, 2019). The remote data collection allowed for a diverse range of

participants from different geographical areas within Northern Cyprus, who might not have been accessible otherwise. This inclusivity helps to capture a broader spectrum of experiences and perspectives among non-native EFL teachers (Erten & Savage, 2012). Additionally, the use of online questionnaires and interviews can reduce social desirability bias, as participants may feel more comfortable and candid in a virtual setting compared to face-to-face interactions (Kuokkanen, 2017). Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the study's methodology ensured a level of accessibility and honesty that might not have been possible through traditional data collection methods. As a result, the subsequent section will include a comprehensive conclusion, along with practical implications and recommendations drawn from the outcomes and discourse.

Conclusion, practical implications and recommendations for practice

The study findings indicate a substantial correlation between language proficiency, anxiety frameworks, and the self-efficacy of EFL teachers in Northern Cyprus. The primary basis for this correlation arises from the misunderstanding that achieving native-like proficiency establishes the norm for language usage, subsequently impacting both teaching approaches and self-perception. These misinterpretations contribute to reduced levels of confidence among non-native English instructors and intensify their apprehension towards language acquisition. In spite of these difficulties, Cypriot EFL educators generally view language proficiency and ESL experience as positive influences on their instructional approaches and self-confidence.

Moving forward, it is crucial to undertake more extensive research to explore the intricate relationship between self-efficacy and language proficiency across diverse EFL contexts. This deeper investigation aims to uncover common correlations and better understand how these factors interact in educational settings. Practical implications from this study suggest the need for targeted professional development programs that address the specific needs and challenges faced by non-native English teachers (Goa, 2021). These programs could focus on enhancing self-efficacy through tailored training in language proficiency, classroom management techniques, and strategies to reduce anxiety related to language teaching (Giraldo, 2014). Additionally, educational policies should emphasize the value of diverse linguistic backgrounds and promote inclusive teaching practices that validate the contributions of all teachers, regardless of their native language (Coelho & Henze, 2014). By implementing these recommendations, educational institutions can foster a more supportive environment for EFL teachers and enhance the overall quality of language education.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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