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A Gender-Based Analysis of Self-Efficacy and Foreign Language Anxiety among Vietnamese Undergraduates

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety (FLA) among Vietnamese undergraduates. Although prior research has identified self-efficacy as a strong predictor of students' academic success, its role may differ in the specific context of foreign language learning and across genders. Data were collected from 323 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students (155 males and 168 females) across various universities in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The study employed the New General Self-Efficacy Scale and the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale as research instruments. Results indicated a moderate negative correlation between self-efficacy and FLA ($r = -.46$, $p < .001$), and self-efficacy moderately predicted FLA ($R^2 = .208$, $p < .001$). Although no statistically significant differences between males and females in levels of self-efficacy and FLA were found, a moderation analysis revealed that the relationship between self-efficacy and FLA was stronger for male students ($b = -.53$) than for female students ($b = -.25$). These findings provide insight into the role of self-efficacy in foreign language learning, particularly in relation to gender differences. The study also suggests directions for future research.

Keywords foreign language anxiety, gender, self-efficacy, Vietnamese undergraduates

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INTRODUCTION

Derived from Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy is defined as an individual's confidence in their ability to organise and execute actions to achieve desired outcomes. This construct significantly predicts commitment, resilience, and success in various contexts, particularly in academic settings, where it supports motivation, perseverance, and achievement (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Conversely, foreign language anxiety (FLA) refers to feelings of tension and nervousness when learning a foreign language and often results in reduced classroom participation and poorer academic outcomes (Horwitz et al., 1986; Liu, 2006). The relationship between self-efficacy and FLA is important in foreign language learning because higher self-efficacy may reduce anxiety and enhance confidence and resilience (Anyadubalu, 2010; Bensalem, 2018).

Research has shown a negative correlation between self-efficacy and FLA, with higher self-efficacy linked to lower anxiety levels (Zhou et al., 2023). However, this relationship may vary across cultural and academic contexts. Given that most prior studies have been conducted in Western or individualistic educational settings, their findings may not be fully generalisable to the Vietnamese context, where social expectations, face-saving concerns, and sensitivity to evaluation are more

pronounced (Klassen, 2004). Gender differences add further complexity to this relationship. Global studies suggest that male students may exhibit higher self-efficacy in certain academic domains (Huang, 2013), while female students often report greater FLA, which may affect their language learning outcomes (Park & French, 2013). However, findings on gender differences in FLA and self-efficacy are mixed, with some studies finding no significant differences (Debreli & Demirkan, 2015).

Although self-efficacy and FLA have been studied extensively in many countries, few studies have explored their association in Vietnam, particularly among undergraduates learning foreign languages. Given the distinct cultural and pedagogical features of Vietnamese classrooms, which may influence both the development of self-efficacy and the experience of anxiety in ways not captured in existing international research, it is essential to address this gap. Most existing research in Vietnam has examined self-efficacy and FLA separately, neglecting their interplay. For instance, studies on self-efficacy have primarily focused on online learning and academic self-regulation (Do & Lai, 2024) and STEM education (Tran et al., 2025). Likewise, research on FLA in Vietnam has generally examined contributing factors such as teacher-student interactions, the classroom environment, and language proficiency (Dang & Robertson, 2010; Tomlinson & Dat, 2004; Tran et al., 2012; Le, 2023).

One particularly notable study by Truong and Wang (2019) investigated the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and English language proficiency. The results suggested that self-efficacy beliefs and English language proficiency were positively correlated. However, no statistically significant differences between male and female students were found. While this research provided important empirical evidence on the connection between self-efficacy and language learning outcomes, it did not account for the potential influence of FLA or investigate whether gender might moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and language proficiency.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating the association between self-efficacy and FLA among Vietnamese undergraduates and exploring whether gender moderates this relationship. The following research questions guided the study.

RQ1. To what extent are self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety associated among Vietnamese undergraduates?
RQ2. Does gender moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety among Vietnamese undergraduates?

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends existing research by integrating self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety (FLA) within a single analytical framework in a non-Western, collectivist context, thereby offering a more context-sensitive understanding of how these constructs interact. Empirically, it seeks to provide evidence from Vietnamese undergraduates and examine the interplay between self-efficacy and FLA, which has received limited attention in prior research that tends to treat these constructs as isolated variables. Furthermore, by investigating gender as a potential moderating factor, this study responds to inconsistent findings in prior research and clarifies whether and how gender shapes the relationship between self-efficacy and FLA in this setting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a core construct in Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory. It refers to an individual's level of confidence in organising and executing the courses of action necessary to achieve desired outcomes. It can predict one's likelihood of committing to planned tasks, overcoming difficulties, and achieving particular goals.

Self-efficacy has been associated with better physical and mental well-being. People with higher levels of self-efficacy are generally more committed and motivated, and they tend to perform tasks more competently and effectively than those with lower levels, particularly in workplace or academic contexts (Mills et al., 2007). In academic settings, self-efficacy is strongly linked to students' motivation, persistence, and achievement (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Students with higher self-efficacy are generally able to adopt better learning strategies, set challenging goals, and recover more quickly from setbacks (Zimmerman, 2000).

Nonetheless, self-efficacy levels may vary among individuals depending on gender, culture, circumstances, and task complexity. In non-Western contexts, self-efficacy is often intertwined with collective beliefs, which may influence how individuals perceive their capabilities (Klassen, 2004). Additionally, prior research suggests that gender differences in self-efficacy are domain-specific and context-dependent (Huang, 2013), indicating the need to consider these factors when examining its role in language learning.

Foreign Language Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) refers to feelings of tension, apprehension, and nervousness specifically associated with language learning situations (Horwitz et al., 1986). Teachers commonly hear students say that they freeze, cannot think of anything to say in the target foreign language, or that *"my mind goes blank"* (Horwitz et al., 1986). Early studies examined stress and anxiety in foreign language classrooms and produced foundational findings. For instance, Jackson (2002) found that learners with FLA are generally quiet, resistant, or unwilling to participate in classroom learning activities, especially those involving speaking. Similarly, Liu (2006) reported a negative correlation between FLA and language proficiency, whereby lower proficiency was associated with more intense and frequent anxiety. Liu also noted that students felt most anxious when called upon to answer the teacher's questions individually, whereas group work and pair work significantly reduced their anxiety levels.

Research has also examined individual differences in FLA, particularly with regard to gender. For instance, Park and French (2013) found that Korean female students reported higher levels of FLA than male students. The study also indicated that female students achieved higher grades than male students, and that students with higher levels of anxiety also tended to achieve higher grades. Similarly, Geckin (2020) observed that female students not only exhibited greater FLA but also perceived delayed feedback and repetition as effective learning strategies, whereas male students preferred immediate elicitation and time for self-correction. However, other studies (Debreli & Demirkan, 2015; Piniel & Zólyomi, 2022) found no statistically significant gender differences in

FLA levels. These mixed findings indicate that the role of gender in FLA is complex and likely mediated by contextual factors such as culture, educational environment, and assessment methods.

Self-Efficacy and Foreign Language Anxiety

Numerous studies have explored the association between self-efficacy and FLA, producing important findings and implications. For instance, Bensalem (2018) found that students with higher self-efficacy were more confident and proficient and experienced foreign language anxiety less frequently in the classroom. Anyadubalu (2010) reported a similar result, finding a negative correlation between self-efficacy and FLA among Thai middle-school students.

Additionally, moderator analyses suggested that this strong negative correlation was consistent across students' proficiency levels, types of FLA and self-efficacy, gender, and income (Zhou et al., 2023). In a study of intermediate college French students found a positive correlation between students' reading self-efficacy and proficiency, while reading anxiety showed no correlation. Regarding gender differences, listening self-efficacy was positively correlated with listening proficiency among females only, while a positive correlation between listening anxiety and proficiency was found in both male and female students (Mills et al., 2006). Similarly, Soysa and Wilcomb (2015) found that, together with mindfulness and self-compassion, self-efficacy strongly predicted undergraduates' levels of stress, anxiety, and well-being.

Beyond these empirical findings, several theoretical perspectives help explain why gender plays a role in the relationship between self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety. Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981) suggests that individuals absorb socially constructed gender roles, which shape how they interpret their abilities and respond to challenges. In language learning contexts, this may influence how male and female students process self-efficacy beliefs and regulate anxiety. Similarly, research on gendered coping strategies indicates that female students are more likely to rely on social and emotion-focused coping, whereas male students tend to adopt more problem-focused or self-reliant approaches (Tamres et al., 2002). These differences imply that the role of self-efficacy in mitigating anxiety may vary across genders, with distinct regulatory mechanisms influencing learners' emotional responses in academic settings.

Overall, the existing literature consistently indicates a negative relationship between self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety, suggesting that learners with stronger beliefs in their capabilities tend to experience lower levels of anxiety and achieve better language learning outcomes. However, despite this consensus, those findings also reveal important nuances. Variations emerge depending on learning contexts, language skills, and individual differences such as gender, with some studies reporting domain-specific or gender-specific effects. Moreover, much of the prior research has examined self-efficacy and FLA either in isolation or in relation to language proficiency, rather than focusing on their direct interplay. These inconsistencies and gaps highlight the need for further research that examines the relationship between self-efficacy and FLA in specific cultural and educational contexts, as well as the potential moderating role of variables such as gender.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A quantitative research design was adopted to investigate general patterns in the relationship between self-efficacy and FLA. The researcher conducted a survey in which participants completed a questionnaire developed using Google Forms. The sample comprised Vietnamese EFL undergraduates from various universities in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample for this study was selected using convenience sampling. This approach was adopted because the target population of Vietnamese university students was too large for census-based sampling models to be implemented (Stratton, 2021). Participants were recruited based on their availability and willingness to complete the survey (Elfil & Negida, 2017). Data were collected through in-person meetings with students from various universities, including both public and private institutions. Additionally, social media platforms were used to contact university students and invite them to participate. The survey link provided all necessary information, including the study objectives, measurement details, and the researcher's contact information. Participants were informed that their personal data would be used solely for this study and would remain confidential. They were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the survey at any time without providing an explanation. The questionnaire was designed to be completed in approximately 10 minutes. After data collection and screening, 323 responses were included in the analysis.

Measurements

The New General Self-Efficacy Scale (NGSES) and the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) were employed to collect data for this study. The NGSES was selected as a domain-general measure of individuals' confidence in managing challenges and achieving goals, which aligns with the study's focus on overall self-beliefs as a predictor of emotional responses in learning contexts. In contrast, the FLCAS was used as a domain-specific instrument designed to assess anxiety associated with foreign language learning situations. The combination of these two scales allowed a theoretically grounded examination of how general self-efficacy relates to context-specific anxiety.

The NGSES includes eight items used to assess individuals' confidence in managing and overcoming difficulties and striving for personal attainments. Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" (Chen et al., 2001). The NGSES demonstrates a high level of internal consistency, with Cronbach's α coefficients ranging from .86 to .90. In the current study, Cronbach's α coefficient was .91 (see Table 2), indicating excellent reliability (Kline, 2004).

The FLCAS consists of 33 items that assess learners' levels of stress, discomfort, and anxiety in various foreign language learning situations. Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" (Horwitz et al., 1986). The FLCAS has satisfactory internal consistency, with a Cronbach's α coefficient of .93. Replication studies using the FLCAS have demonstrated similar reliability levels (Cheng et al., 1999; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Yan & Horwitz, 2008). In the current study, Cronbach's α coefficient was .94 (see Table 2), indicating high internal consistency (Kline, 2004).

The NGSES and the FLCAS underwent a rigorous back-translation process to ensure linguistic accuracy and cultural relevance. A professional translator was recruited to translate the measures into Vietnamese. A second translator then translated the measures back into English. Comparing the two translated versions enabled errors and ambiguities to be identified and corrected promptly, ensuring linguistic and cultural appropriateness (International Test Commission, 2017). The following example items illustrate the Vietnamese adaptation. For the FLCAS, Item 9, "*I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class*", was translated as "*Tôi bắt đầu hoảng loạn khi phải nói mà không có sự chuẩn bị trong lớp học tiếng Anh.*" For the NGSES, Item 1, "*I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I set for myself*", was translated as "*Tôi tin rằng mình có thể đạt được hầu hết các mục tiêu mà bản thân đã đặt ra*".

Data Analysis

The current study used IBM SPSS Statistics version 27.0 to analyse the data. First, descriptive statistics and reliability analyses were performed to provide a general understanding of the sample characteristics and assess the internal consistency of the two measurement instruments in this study.

For the first research question, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed to explore the relationship between self-efficacy and FLA among Vietnamese undergraduates. In addition, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted to assess the extent to which self-efficacy predicted FLA. Before the regression analysis, the assumptions of linearity, normality, homoscedasticity, and independence of errors were examined. The normality of residuals was confirmed through a histogram and normal probability plots. Additionally, the Durbin–Watson statistic indicated no violation of the independence assumption. To address the second research question, an independent-samples t-test was performed to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between male and female students in levels of self-efficacy and FLA. A moderation analysis using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017) was also conducted to investigate whether gender moderated the relationship between self-efficacy and FLA.

RESULTS

Descriptive analysis of the sample (Table 1) revealed that, among the 323 participants, 155 were male (48%) and 168 were female (52%). Analysis of participants' ages showed that 207 were aged 18–20 years (64.1%), 100 were aged 21–22 years (31%), and 16 were over 22 years old (5%). Regarding academic year, 111 were first-year students (34.4%), 103 were second-year students (31.9%), 88 were third-year students (27.2%), and 21 were fourth-year students (6.5%).

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of the Sample*

Variables	Descriptive statistics
Gender	Male: 155 (48%) Female: 168 (52%)
Age range	18-20 years old: 207 (64.1%) 21-22 years old: 100 (31.0%) Over 22 years old: 16 (5.0%)
Student academic year	First year: 111 (34.4%)

	Second year: 103 (31.9%) Third year: 88 (27.2%) Fourth year: 21 (6.5%)

A Pearson correlation analysis was performed to explore the linear relationship between self-efficacy (M = 3.53, SD = .70) and FLA (M = 2.70, SD = .63) among the participants (see Table 2). The results showed a statistically significant, moderate negative correlation between students' self-efficacy and FLA levels, r = -.46, p < .001. This suggests that students with higher self-efficacy tended to experience lower levels of foreign language anxiety.

Table 2. *Reliability Coefficients, Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations between the NGSES and FLCAS*

	Variable	No. of items	α	Mean	SD	*r*	
						1	2
1	Self-efficacy	8	.91	3.53	.70		
2	Anxiety	33	.94	2.70	.63	-.456**	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to further examine whether self-efficacy predicted FLA among the students (see Table 3). The results revealed a significant regression model, $F(1, 321) = 84.17$, $p < .001$. The model explained 20.8% of the variance in FLA ($R^2 = .208$), suggesting that self-efficacy was a moderate predictor of students' FLA levels (Cohen, 1988). The regression coefficient for self-efficacy was significant (B = -.41, β = -.46, t = -9.18, $p < .001$), indicating that increases in self-efficacy were associated with notable decreases in anxiety levels. These findings indicate that self-efficacy is an important psychological factor associated with students' experience of foreign language anxiety.

Table 3. *Linear Regression Analysis of Self-efficacy as a Predictor of Anxiety*

Predictor	***B***	***SE***	***β***	***t***	***p***
(Constant)	4.146	.161		25.81	<.001
Self-Efficacy	-.409	.045	-.456	-9.18	<.001

Note. N = 323. Dependent variable: Anxiety. R = .456, R^2 = .208, Adjusted R^2 = .205, $F(1, 321) = 84.17$.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in self-efficacy and FLA levels among students (see Table 4). The results indicated no significant difference in self-efficacy between female students (M = 3.55, SD = .64) and male students (M = 3.51, SD = .77), $t(321) = -.519$, $p = .60$. The negligible effect size (Cohen's d = .058) suggested virtually no practical difference between the groups. However, female students (M = 2.77, SD = .56) reported slightly higher anxiety than male students (M = 2.63, SD = .67), with the difference approaching statistical significance, $t(321) = -1.91$, $p = .06$. The effect size for this difference was small (Cohen's d = .221), indicating that the gender difference in anxiety was limited in practical terms.

Table 4. *Difference between Male and Female Students in the Levels of Anxiety and Self-efficacy*

	Male		Female					
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*	Cohen's *d*
Self-efficacy	3.509	.770	3.550	.639	321	-.519	.602	.058

Anxiety	2.630	.698	2.765	.559	321	-1.913	.057	.221

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation

A moderation analysis was conducted to assess whether gender moderated the relationship between self-efficacy and FLA. The PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017) was used to estimate the model (see Table 5). A significant interaction effect was found between self-efficacy and gender in predicting FLA, $b = 0.28$, SE = 0.09, $t(319) = 3.16$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.45]. A simple-slopes analysis revealed that the negative association between self-efficacy and anxiety was significant for both male students ($b = -.53$, SE = 0.06, $t(319) = -9.21$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.65, -.42]) and female students ($b = -.25$, SE = 0.07, $t(319) = -3.79$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.38, -.12]). However, the effect was significantly stronger for male students, indicating that gender moderated the relationship between self-efficacy and FLA.

Table 5. *Summary of Moderated Regression Analysis Predicting Anxiety*

					95% CI	
	b	se	*t*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.469	.098	25.071	.000	2.275	2.662
Self-efficacy (A)	-.812	.133	-6.081	.000	-1.074	-.549
Gender (B)	.151	.062	2.448	.015	.030	.272
A x B	.279	.088	3.164	.002	.106	.453

Note. $R^2 = .246$, $F(3, 319) = 34.636$, $p < .001$. Gender coded as 1 = male, 2 = female.

Conditional Effects of Self-Efficacy on Anxiety at Gender Levels

Gender	effect	se	*t*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
Male	-.532	.058	-9.210	.000	-.646	-.419
Female	-.253	.067	-3.785	.000	-.384	-.121

These findings do not contradict the results of the independent-samples *t*-tests reported in Table 4. The *t*-tests examined mean differences between male and female students and showed no statistically significant differences in anxiety or self-efficacy. By contrast, the moderation analysis assessed whether the strength of the relationship between self-efficacy and anxiety varied by gender. The significant interaction effect indicates that, although overall anxiety levels were similar across genders, the association between self-efficacy and anxiety differed between male and female students. This suggests that gender shapes how self-efficacy relates to FLA rather than influencing the overall levels of these variables.

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the interplay between self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety (FLA) among Vietnamese undergraduates learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), with specific emphasis on the moderating role of gender. Drawing on Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which positions self-efficacy as a pivotal mechanism for regulating behaviour, motivation, and emotional responses in challenging tasks, this research extends the application of SCT to the culturally nuanced context of foreign language learning in a collectivist society such as Vietnam.

The moderate negative correlation between self-efficacy and FLA indicates that students with stronger beliefs in their ability to organise and execute actions towards language learning goals experienced lower anxiety. In practical terms, self-efficacy was associated with fewer of the debilitating effects of FLA, such as reduced classroom participation and impaired performance (Horwitz et al., 1986). This correlation is consistent with the meta-analytic evidence of Zhou et al. (2023), who reported a robust negative association across diverse populations. However, the moderate strength of the association in this sample may reflect Vietnam's collectivist cultural orientation. As Klassen (2004) notes, in non-Western contexts, self-efficacy is often intertwined with collective efficacy, as group harmony and social expectations temper individual confidence. Thus, Vietnamese students' self-efficacy might be less individually pronounced, leading to a weaker correlation with FLA than in individualistic Western samples. Recent studies in the Vietnamese context are also consistent with this interpretation. For instance, Thach and Khau (2025) reported that Vietnamese EFL students experienced high levels of anxiety, particularly in productive skills such as writing and speaking, largely because of fear of negative evaluation and inadequate preparation, factors closely associated with low self-confidence. Similarly, Luu and Truong (2024) found a positive relationship between self-efficacy and English-speaking performance among Vietnamese undergraduates, highlighting the role of emotional and experiential factors in shaping learners' confidence.

Furthermore, the regression analysis demonstrated that self-efficacy was a moderate predictor of FLA. This predictive relationship is consistent with SCT's triadic reciprocal determinism, in which personal factors (e.g., self-efficacy) interact with behavioural (e.g., language engagement) and environmental (e.g., classroom dynamics) elements to influence outcomes such as anxiety (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). However, the substantial unexplained variance (79.2%) highlights the multifaceted nature of FLA, which may be influenced by unexamined variables such as language proficiency, teacher feedback, or sociocultural pressures (Horwitz, 2010; Liu & Jackson, 2008). In the Vietnamese EFL context, where English proficiency is often tied to socioeconomic mobility and national development goals (Truong & Wang, 2019), this unexplained variance may stem from external stressors such as high-stakes testing or limited exposure to native speakers. Educators could respond by designing curricula that target sources of self-efficacy, such as vicarious experiences through peer modelling, to reduce FLA incrementally and potentially improve retention and proficiency in Vietnam's expanding EFL programmes.

Regarding gender differences, the findings indicated no statistically significant differences in either FLA or self-efficacy between male and female students, suggesting broadly comparable levels across genders. Although female students reported slightly higher anxiety (M = 2.77) than male students (M = 2.63), this difference was small and did not reach statistical significance. This pattern contrasts with prior studies (Park & French, 2013; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), which reported significant gender differences in FLA, often with male students experiencing lower anxiety. One possible explanation for this attenuation is Vietnam's evolving sociocultural context, where educational policies and broader social changes have increasingly promoted gender equity (UNESCO Office Hanoi, 2018; World Bank, 2018). In such a context, traditional gender roles may be less pronounced, contributing to more similar emotional and motivational experiences among male and female students.

Similarly, the absence of gender differences in self-efficacy contrasts with earlier findings suggesting higher self-efficacy among male students (Pajares, 2002), but aligns with research indicating that such differences are context-dependent and may diminish in more equitable educational environments (Wigfield et al., 1996; Huang, 2013). Institutional factors in Vietnamese universities, such as mixed-gender classrooms and relatively gender-neutral curricula, may help foster comparable levels of self-efficacy. This aligns with research suggesting that gender differences in self-perceptions are shaped more by social and contextual influences than by inherent traits (Hyde, 2005).

A key contribution of this study is the identification of gender's moderating effect on the relationship between self-efficacy and FLA, with a stronger inverse association for male students than for female students. This interaction implies that self-efficacy has a stronger anxiety-mitigating association among male students, potentially because of gendered coping mechanisms and perceptions of the learning environment. Female students may draw on relational coping strategies, such as seeking social support, which may weaken the role of self-efficacy in anxiety regulation (Tamres et al., 2002; Sun & Stewart, 2007). Conversely, male students might rely more heavily on internal self-beliefs, especially in perceived "female-oriented" domains such as language learning, where they may face stereotypes of lower aptitude (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2000). Additional psychological factors, including female students' greater susceptibility to perfectionism and fear of evaluation (Liu & Jackson, 2008), could further explain why the protective role of self-efficacy is weaker for them. Theoretically, this finding extends SCT by integrating Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981), which proposes that societal schemas influence how individuals of different genders process efficacy information. In Vietnam, where collectivism emphasises harmony over individual assertion, this moderation may reflect male students' greater sensitivity to efficacy cues in competitive academic settings. This interpretation challenges universalist views of self-efficacy and supports culturally sensitive models that account for gender as a dynamic moderator.

The findings of this study offer practical implications for foreign language teaching. Given the negative relationship between self-efficacy and FLA, teachers should prioritise actionable classroom strategies, such as scaffolded speaking tasks, structured peer support, and consistent positive feedback, to build students' confidence (Goh, 2017; Ho & Dang, 2019; Sallang & Ling, 2019). At a more structured level, targeted interventions such as idea-generation techniques in writing tasks have been effective in improving self-efficacy in Vietnamese contexts (Nguyen et al., 2024). For longer-term implementation, programmes such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) have been shown to reduce stress and anxiety more broadly (Chang et al., 2004) and may also be beneficial in foreign language learning contexts (Chau, 2025), although they require greater institutional support. Additionally, because gender moderated this relationship, teachers are encouraged to adopt flexible and inclusive approaches that address diverse learner needs. For instance, students may benefit from confidence-building approaches in English classes, such as positive reinforcement. Some research also suggests that social support networks can contribute to the development of self-efficacy and resilience, particularly among female learners (Tamres et al., 2002).

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, its cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences. Although self-efficacy and FLA were correlated, longitudinal research is needed to determine whether enhancing self-efficacy directly leads to sustained reductions in

FLA. Second, the study employed convenience sampling, with participants recruited through both in-person contact and social media platforms. While this strategy enabled access to a diverse group of university students, it also limits the representativeness of the sample because the exact number and distribution of participating universities could not be determined precisely. Additionally, social media recruitment may have introduced self-selection bias because students who encountered and chose to complete the survey may differ systematically from those who did not (Bethlehem, 2010). Similarly, because the study relied entirely on self-reported quantitative data, potential biases such as social desirability and recall inaccuracies may have affected the responses (Fisher & Katz, 2000). Future studies could address these limitations by employing mixed-methods approaches, including classroom observations or experimental designs. Finally, the study did not account for additional variables, such as personality traits, teaching styles, or language proficiency levels, which may interact with self-efficacy and FLA. Addressing these gaps in future research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships among self-efficacy, gender, and FLA.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the growing body of research on foreign language learning by examining the interplay between self-efficacy and FLA among Vietnamese undergraduates, with gender as a moderator. The study found a moderate negative correlation between self-efficacy and FLA. It also found that self-efficacy predicted students' FLA to a moderate extent and that the relationship between self-efficacy and FLA was stronger for male students than for female students. Theoretically, the study extends Social Cognitive Theory to a Vietnamese EFL context, suggesting that the association between self-efficacy and anxiety is culturally situated and gender-dependent. In a collectivist learning culture, efficacy beliefs are intertwined with social expectations and interpersonal evaluation, resulting in distinctive emotional patterns. Practically, the findings emphasise the need for culturally responsive pedagogy that fosters students' confidence and reduces anxiety through context-appropriate, gender-sensitive interventions. By integrating psychological empowerment with cultural understanding, educators can create more equitable and emotionally supportive language classrooms.

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DECLARATION

Ethics Approval and Informed Consent

At the time the study was conducted, formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) or institutional ethics-committee review was not required or routinely available for low-risk educational research of this type within the researcher's local institutional context in Vietnam. The researcher implemented a comprehensive set of ethical safeguards aligned with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013).

AI Tool Use

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT 3.5 to check grammar, improve language clarity and expression, and refine the organization of author-generated text. The tool was used in Literature Review, Methodology, and Discussion. The author reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-assisted output and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Author Contributions

The sole author was responsible for the conceptualization, research design, analysis, interpretation, and preparation of the manuscript and accepts full responsibility for the work.

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