

GENERAL AND LANGUAGE LEARNING SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS OF GERMAN AND ENGLISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The process of learning a foreign language is complex and various internal and external factors have an impact on students' academic success in the foreign language classroom. In the context of foreign language learning self-efficacy is defined as a person's perception of competence, rather than the actual level of competence, since confidence plays a fundamental role in foreign language learning. A student with a high level of self-efficacy tends to put more work into their studying, has higher levels of confidence and optimism when setbacks are encountered, and is more capable of addressing challenges, leading to an overall enhancement of their participation in learning. The present study aims to highlight the relationship between foreign language learning (German and English) and self-efficacy among undergraduate students of nursing, physiotherapy, midwifery, radiologic technology, and sanitary engineering of the Faculty of Health Studies, University of Mostar and establish if there are any differences in the way German and English learners perceive their general and foreign language self-efficacy. The study includes 53 undergraduate students studying at one of five majors and the Faculty of Health Studies in Mostar. Two scales were used in the study, the final version of the German Learning Self-Efficacy Belief Scale and the General Self-Efficacy Scale. The results reveal that the participants do not differ significantly on the levels for general and foreign language learning self-efficacy. Students of the Faculty of Health Studies have moderate levels of general and foreign language learning self-efficacy. These findings indicate that students regardless of the foreign language they study need to foster their abilities and perceptions in foreign language learning.

Keywords: self-efficacy, foreign language learning, German, English

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INTRODUCTION

The process of mastering another language is subject to numerous influences (mother tongue, grammar, cognitive development, and many more). The term of self-efficacy has become the subject of research within the domain of educational psychology. The process of learning a foreign language (FL) is complex and various internal and external factors have an impact on the student's academic success in the FL classroom.

It is also a stressful process and it is natural for the learner to feel anxious. Self-efficacy beliefs have a high impact on the level of anxiety a student has in the FL classroom.

Since, students' success does not only depend on the knowledge and skills they have, it also depends on the necessity to have a high self-efficacy belief in order to use their knowledge and skills effectively (2).

The term self-efficacy, now well-known in many disciplines, was for the first time mentioned by psychologist Albert Bandura in 1977, in the article *Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behaviour Change*. Today, this particular term is of interest in many different fields such as, sociology, linguistics, medical sciences and many more. The most simple definition of the term self-efficacy would be an individual's beliefs of what they are capable of doing.

In the context of foreign language learning, a more suitable definition would be that self-efficacy is defined as a person's perception of competence, rather than the actual level of competence (3), since confidence plays a fundamental role in foreign language learning.

According to Bandura, self-efficacy is connected with coping mechanisms, level of psychological stress, self-regulation, withdrawal, depression at failure, striving for achievement, internal motivation, and professional career aspirations. Knowledge and skills are necessary, but alone are insufficient for achievements. Efficacy implies the organization of cognitive, social and behavioral skills in achieving a specific goal. The higher the self-efficacy, the better the performance, and the lower the emotional arousal or psychological stress (4). Individual beliefs are the foundation for future success or failure in various aspects of life, including academic success. Good academic results in foreign language learning come from high levels of perceived self-efficacy in learners.

Self-efficacy does not only determine the level of motivation but also the individual's level of resistance to difficulties and failures. People with low self-efficacy beliefs easily begin to believe that their efforts are in vain and therefore easily give up. Accordingly, it is a strong predictor of improving language skills and learning performance (2). People's beliefs about their abilities also affect their way of thinking. Individuals may think pessimistically or optimistically in line with their self-efficacy beliefs. Therefore, more research on self-efficacy beliefs and its status in foreign language learning is important for the prevention of low self-efficacy which can produce numerous negative factors in the language learning process. The main objective of the study is to explore the level of general self-efficacy and foreign language learning self-efficacy among students of undergraduate studies at

the Faculty of Health Studies in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

There is a positive correlation between self-efficacy and academic achievement. Specifically, the evidence has shown that students with high self-efficacy in various academic domains choose to engage in tasks that foster the development of their knowledge, skills, and abilities in those areas; exert effort in the face of difficulty; and persist longer at challenging tasks (5, 6).

According to previous research, academic self-efficacy helps students in the following; set clear and specific results and encourage the use of challenging and proximal goals (7). Perceived self-efficacy is also positively correlated with students' choice of majors, success in course work, and perseverance in the field of study. Self-efficacy does not only have a predictive effect, but also plays a mediational role in the relationship between students' learning outcomes and other factors such as academic attitudes (8). High self-efficacy leads individuals to believe in their ability for successfully performing a specific task, while low self-efficacy results in a belief that they will fail at that task (9). Academic self-efficacy is an important subset of self-efficacy, reflecting the perception of the student of their potential success or failure in academic-related tasks and has been defined as a student's belief and confidence in their capability of succeeding in academic endeavors. It has been found to reliably positively predict academic achievement (10). A student with a high level of self-efficacy tends to put more work into their studying, has higher levels of confidence and optimism when setbacks are encountered, and is more

capable of addressing challenges, leading to an overall enhancement of their participation in learning (11). The role of self-efficacy in the foreign language learning process is still scarce. Nevertheless, it has been shown as a strong predictor of performance in foreign language learning, and according to previous research, it plays a significant role in the development of foreign language skills, such as writing, reading or listening (12, 13, 14).

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

In the past few decades, the notion of self-efficacy has generated significant attention and a great amount of research in various scientific fields, including foreign language learning. There is a lack of research focusing on self-efficacy beliefs in the context of foreign language learning, especially in German as a foreign language and its comparison to English foreign language learners in any context. However, there has been a growing interest in self-efficacy beliefs within the field of language learning in the past decade. In foreign language learning contexts, research studies have examined self-efficacy in relation to a limited number of variables namely learning strategies, performance, causal attributions, and language anxiety. Among the different findings, the most consistent one is that learners' self-efficacy for foreign language affects performance in different language domains. Considering the critical role of beliefs and thoughts, more research on learners' self-efficacy and how to develop it in university educational settings is necessary for further development in this field of study (15).

A study by Busse suggests that the levels of self-efficacy are higher as students gain more academic experience. This study on 59 university students learning German as a foreign language explores the relationship between self-efficacy belief and foreign language learning, self-efficacy was relatively low at the beginning of the year, and self-efficacy beliefs for speaking and listening further declined over the course of the year (16). Hsieh (2008) in a study on 249 undergraduates learning Spanish, German and French found that self-efficacy was once again a good predictor of achievement. The results indicate significant differences between successful and unsuccessful students. Students with higher self-efficacy reported being more interested in learning the foreign language (17). Tilfarlioglu and Cinkara carried out a study on 175 students of the Faculty of Engineering in order to investigate self-efficacy in English as a Foreign Language. The results showed a high sense of self-efficacy in EFL among students of this particular major. Students with high self-efficacy beliefs reported feeling more efficacious than students with low self-efficacy beliefs in managing academic activities (18). Akin and Akpinar Dellal's study investigated self-efficacy of students studying German, student's self-efficacy was examined according to high school attended, grade level and gender. As a result, no significant relationship was found between high school type and self-efficacy. On the other hand, it was determined that the 4th grade students had the highest self-efficacy and male students had higher self-efficacy than female students (2). Studies on self-efficacy beliefs in FL are almost non-existent in

Bosnia and Herzegovina, therefore it is very difficult to compare or validate study results. In 2014, Ozturk and Turkyilmaz investigated beliefs of Bosnian students toward language learning, and came to a conclusion that students' beliefs were generally positive on language learning and in terms of motivation and expectation, the participants showed considerably high scores in foreign language learning (19).

There is a lack of studies studying the relationship of general and FL self-efficacy beliefs among German and English foreign language learners at university level, especially research on the differences in self-efficacy among German and English foreign language learners. The current study will examine the general self-efficacy of FL learners and self-efficacy in language skills, language learning performance and language learning confidence among German and English FL learners.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study aims to highlight the relationship between foreign language learning (German and English) and self-efficacy among undergraduate students of nursing, physiotherapy, midwifery, radiologic technology, and sanitary engineering and establish if there are any differences in the way German and English learners perceive their general and foreign language self-efficacy.

PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS

The study included 53 undergraduate students studying at one of five majors and the Faculty of Health Studies in Mostar. There was an unequal distribution of participants ($X^2 = 32.208$, df

= 1, $p < 0.001$) in regards to gender, there were significantly more female students (92.45%) when compared to male counterparts (7.55%). The largest number of students was from the nursing and physiotherapy studies (each 16 or 13.19%), students from the study of midwifery made up only 11.32% and sanitary engineering with 9.43% ($X^2 = 10.491$, $df = 4$, $p =$

0.033). Students from the study of radiologic technology made up 18.87% of the total number of participants. An equal number of students study German (26 or 49.06%) and English (27 or 50.94%). The distribution with regard to study major and foreign language is shown in Table 1 ($X^2 = 0.019$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.891$)

Table 1. Distribution of students according to foreign language and study major (N = 53)

Study major		English	German
		f (%)	f (%)
	Nursing	9 (56.25 %)	7 (43.75 %)
	Physiotherapy	8 (50 %)	8 (50 %)
	Radiologic technology	5 (50 %)	5 (50 %)
	Sanitary engineering	1 (20 %)	4 (80 %)
	Midwifery	4 (66.67 %)	2 (33.33 %)

STUDY INSTRUMENTS

Two scales were used in the study. The first was the final version of the German Learning Self-Efficacy Belief Scale. The scale has three subdimensions: Language Learning Performance, Language Skills, and Language Learning Confidence. The scale differs from other language learning self-efficacy scales as it includes the effort and psychological state of the student as well as linguistic skills in the measurement. A 5-point Likert-type scale with 28-items was used to measure the self-efficacy beliefs of students learning German or English as a foreign language (2). The second scale or the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) consists of ten items, given in the format of Likert's four-point scale, and according to previous research, it has good reliability and validity and is among the most widely used scale in studying self-efficacy. The result of general self-efficacy was formed as a

linear sum of the answers to the statements for examining general self-efficacy on a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 is “strongly disagree”, 2 “disagree”, 3 “agree”, and 4 “strongly agree”.

The internal consistency reliability of Cronbach alpha in this study was an adequate 0.745. The result on German Learning Self-Efficacy Belief Scale was formed as a linear combination of results on individual statements, and in addition to overall self-efficacy when learning a foreign language, results on individual subscales were considered: language skills, language learning performance and language learning confidence. The internal consistency reliability for this scale was a high Cronbach alpha = 0.924, while the reliability of individual subscales ranged from an acceptable 0.726 (language learning performance), to a high 0.895

(language learning confidence) and a very high 0.934 (language skills).

of $p < 0.05$ was taken as statistically significant.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The data were collected through a Google sheet and were analyzed using SPSS 20.0 statistical software (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). Basic descriptive data for quantitative data are presented through arithmetic mean as a measure of central tendency and standard deviation as a measure of dispersion, graphically using a histogram and box diagram, and qualitative data are presented through frequency, percentage and graphically, using a pie chart. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to test the normality of the distribution of results, while differences in general self-efficacy and self-efficacy when learning a foreign language were examined with the Student t-test. The relationship between the variables was examined with the Pearson correlation coefficient. A probability level

RESULTS

The results on general self-efficacy and foreign language learning self-efficacy are shown in Table 2. It is evident that the minimum score on the general self-efficacy scale is 22 - not a single participant achieves the minimum theoretical score of 9, which means that participants who estimate their self-efficacy as the lowest in this study, score a minimum of 22 points on the scale, while the maximum score achieved is 36, with a score range of 14. The largest dispersion of results is registered around the central value on the foreign language learning self-efficacy scale, while the smallest is on the general self-efficacy scale.

Table 2. Basic descriptive parameters of the results of general self-efficacy and foreign language learning self-efficacy (N = 53)

	Min	Max	M	Sd
General self-efficacy	22	36	26.434	2.707
Foreign language learning self-efficacy	42	96	70.302	11.893
Subscale: language skills	8	30	19.283	4.857
Subscale: language learning performance	16	37	27.132	4.048
Subscale: language learning confidence	13	35	23.887	4.945

The results reveal, that the participants do not differ significantly on the levels of general self-efficacy and foreign language

learning self-efficacy (Figure 1), that is, they report a similar level of general self-efficacy and FL learning self-efficacy ($t = 0.111$, $df = 52$, $p = 0.912$).

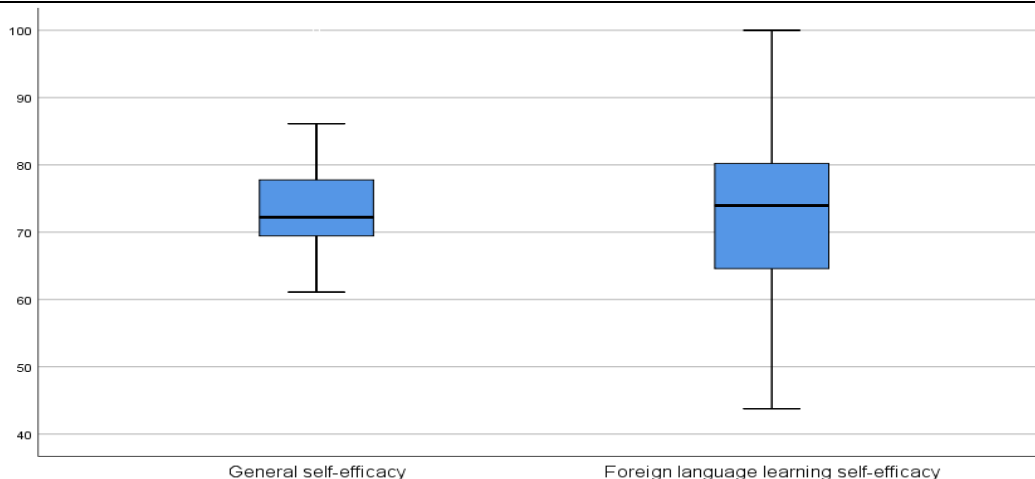


Figure 1. Presentation of general self-efficacy and FL learning self-efficacy among students of the Faculty of Health Studies (N = 53)

The results also reveal no significant correlation between the level of general self-efficacy and FL learning self-efficacy (Table 3). Students who report higher levels of general self-efficacy, on average do have to have higher levels of FL learning self-efficacy. The results on the subscales for FL learning self-efficacy are, as expected, related to the results on individual subscales, and the specified type of self-efficacy is statistically significantly

and most closely related to language skills. The results on certain subscales for FL learning self-efficacy are also significantly positively correlated, and the subscales for language skills and learning confidence show the greatest correlation. Students who scored higher for language skills and performance in learning a foreign language also report greater language confidence when learning German or English and vice versa.

Table 3. Correlation between general self-efficacy and FL learning self-efficacy among students of the Faculty of Health Studies

	Foreign language learning self-efficacy	General self-efficacy	Language skills	Language learning performance	Language learning confidence
Foreign language learning self-efficacy	-	0.241	0.906**	0.777**	0.88*
General self-efficacy		-	0.146	0.13	0.33*
Subscale: language skills			-	.571**	.728**
Subscale: language learning performance				-	.489**
Subscale: Language learning confidence					-

*p < 0.05

The results of the FL learning self-efficacy subscales reveal that the students achieve statistically significantly higher results on the subscale for language performance than language skills ($t = -4.92$, $df = 52$, $p < 0.001$) and confidence when learning German or English ($t = -$

2.853 , $df = 52$, $p = 0.006$) and they have significantly higher language confidence when learning a foreign language as opposed to self-efficacy on the subscale for language skills ($t = -5.399$, $df = 52$, $p < 0.001$, Figure 3).

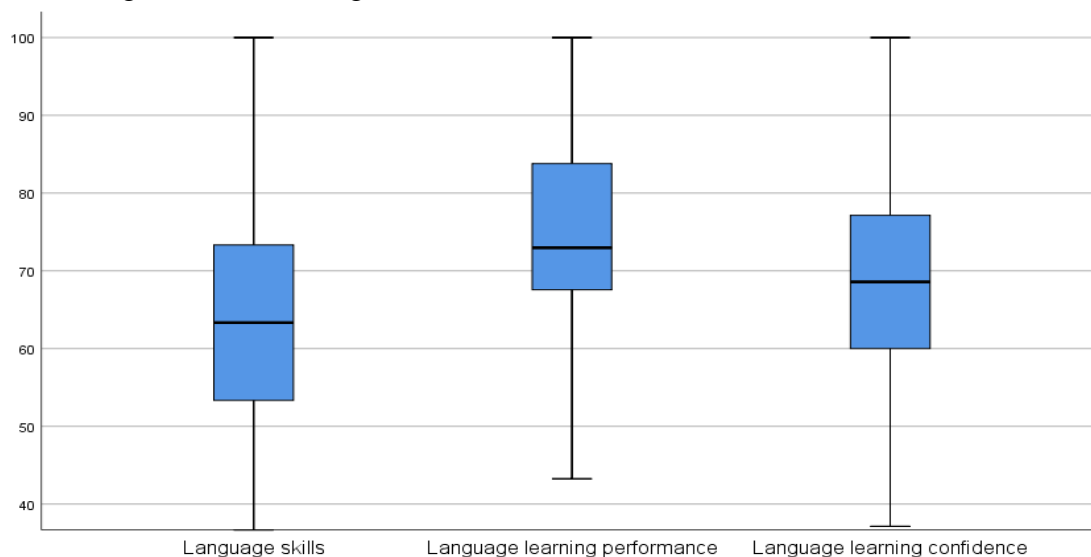


Figure 3. Results of the subscales for language skills, language performance and language learning confidence

In the analysis of the overall degree of general self-efficacy among students of The Faculty of Health Studies we took into account the histogram of the obtained results, measures of normality, dispersion and curvature of the distribution of the results and the frequency of individual answers and came to a conclusion that the distribution of the results of general self-

efficacy follows the curve of normal distribution and that the parameters for asymmetry and flattening are as expected (20). This indicates that the majority of study participants scored moderate results on the general self-efficacy scale. The results do not indicate an extremely high or an extremely low perception of general self-efficacy, but average (Figure 4).

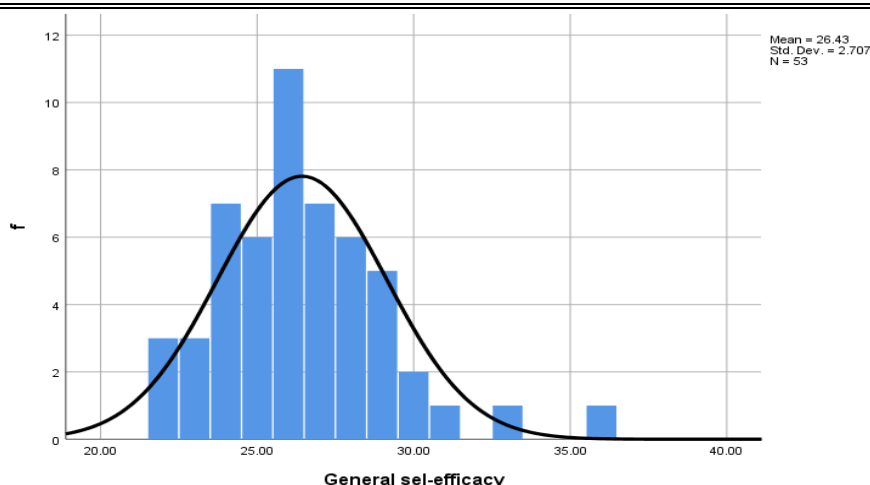


Figure 4. Distribution of general self-efficacy results among students of the Faculty of Health Studies

In analyzing the tendencies of answers to individual statements and their differences, it was determined that the participants mostly do not answer with “strongly disagree” to most of the statements, with the exception of the third statement (*I easily achieve my goals and achieve my intentions*) where two or 3.8% of students strongly disagree with statement. Students mostly answered with “disagree” or “agree” to the majority of statement that is they chose moderate

values in relation to strongly disagreeing or strongly agreeing, which confirms the aforementioned finding that overall, they show moderate levels of general self-efficacy. There was no statistically significant difference in the levels of general self-efficacy between German and English language students at the Faculty of Health Studies (Table 4), which points to the conclusion that students show equal levels of general self-efficacy regardless of the foreign language they learn.

Table 4. Difference in general self-efficacy among students of German or English at the Faculty of Health Studies

		M	Sd	t	df	p
Foreign language	English	26.148	1.916	- 0.78	51	0.439
	German	26.731	3.353			

There were also no statistically significant differences in the perception of self-efficacy when learning German or English among undergraduate students of the Faculty of Health Studies, nor differences in the perception of language skills, language learning performance and language learning confidence (and to answers on individual statements on the

scale, $p > 0.05$) when learning English /German language with regard to the study major (nursing, physiotherapy, radiologic technology, sanitary engineering, midwifery) (Table 5). The correlations between the two scales show that self-efficacy is linked to students’ self-perceived effort to engage with language learning. The findings therefore tie in with

a substantial body of evidence obtained in mainstream motivational research showing a link between self-efficacy beliefs and learning behavior (18).

Accordingly, the analysis did not reveal any statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$), except on subscale for language learning confidence,

statement 7 (*I can learn German/English on my own without the need for a special course*), where participants studying English scored significantly higher. This leads to a conclusion that students learning German are less likely to perceive they have the ability to learn the foreign language without additional support.

Table 5. Differences in language learning self-efficacy according to foreign language (German or English)

	Foreign language at the Faculty of Health Studies	M	Sd	T	df	p
Foreign language learning self-efficacy (overall results)	English	71.407	11.355	0.686	51	0.496
	German	69.154	12.547			
Subscale: language skills	English	20.111	4.509	1.272	51	0.209
	German	18.423	5.139			
Subscale: language learning performance	English	27.333	3.873	0.965	51	0.716
	German	26.923	4.288			
Subscale: language learning confidence	English	23.963	4.743	0.113	51	0.91
	German	23.801	5.239			

DISCUSSION

This study's primary objective was the exploration of general and foreign language learning beliefs among German and English language learners at the Faculty of Health Studies University of Mostar. Self-efficacy beliefs are an important factor since stronger self-efficacy enhances the language learning process and learners' ability in task performance.

On the basis of the retained results, we can conclude that the students of the

Faculty of Health Studies have moderate levels of general and foreign language learning self-efficacy. These findings indicate that students regardless of the foreign language they study at the Faculty of Health Studies need to foster their abilities and perceptions in foreign language learning. According to Gahungu, students with high and very high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to engage with language tasks and manage any difficulty found in the language learning process (21).

The largest difference between German and English foreign language learners was on the language skills subscale, where German learners believed they need more support in developing language skills than their English counterparts. These findings could be related to the length of studying the foreign language and therefore subject of further research in this field.

The results also reveal that students scored significantly higher results on the subscales for language learning performance than on those for language skills or language learning confidence, where language skills had the lowest results, suggesting more attention should be given to the development of these skills in the classroom. There were no significant differences among study majors in regards to FL learning self-efficacy beliefs. This opposes previous literature data which suggest learners with different goal orientations also differ in their self-efficacy beliefs (22).

Our results suggest that there is need of finding ways of increasing students' self-efficacy beliefs. More attention has to be paid to the particular needs of university students. One may for example think of ways of stimulating students' visions of becoming multilingual European citizen. Given the recent surge of interest in the development of a European identity (European Commission, 2012), this is a timely approach, which could be complemented by raising first-year students' awareness of different career paths that involve foreign language skills. The stable relationship found between instrumental orientation and self-perceived effort suggests that such an approach could be promising (16). Previous studies on

foreign language learning motivation at the Faculty of Health Studies University of Mostar suggest that students have high levels of internal motivation when it comes to language learning, with English FL students being more motivated than German FL students (23, 24).

One of the restrictions of the study was the study sample, where we had a significantly higher number of female students as opposed to male students. This could be due to the fact that the majority of respondents were from the nursing study, which is mainly a female dominated profession in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Naturally, the small scale and exploratory nature of the present study poses strong limitations, therefore in future studies it is important to find ways to motivate students to participate in scientific research. Finally, the present study found a significant relationship between self-efficacy and beliefs in foreign language learning. Although the findings in the study are based on self-reported data, which implies certain built-in limitations, they do provide a foundation for further research about language learners' German and English self-efficacy and their beliefs on language learning.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the findings, some suggestions for future studies can be made. Firstly, taking into consideration the complexity of beliefs about language learning, the combination of multiple sources of data might be employed in studies on German and English self-efficacy and beliefs in language learning. It might also be recommended that researchers for the future studies should try investigating the ways to enhance self-

efficacy of language learners and help them develop positive beliefs in foreign language learning. Further research might evaluate the relationships among students' foreign language self-efficacy and beliefs about language learning in different cultures and with the participants from different educational background and experiences. Lastly, future research will have to explore how teaching techniques can best be combined to stimulate self-efficacy beliefs.

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SAMOUČINKOVITOST PRI UČENJU NJEMAČKOG I ENGLESKOG KAO STRANOG JEZIKA

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SAŽETAK

Usvajanje stranog jezika složen je proces u kojem akademski uspjeh studenata oblikuju različiti unutarnji i vanjski čimbenici. U kontekstu učenja stranog jezika, samoučinkovitost se definira kao percepcija vlastite kompetencije, a ne stvarna razina kompetencije, jer samopouzdanje igra ključnu ulogu u tom procesu. Student s visokom razinom samoučinkovitosti sklon je ulagati više truda u svoje učenje, ima veću razinu samopouzdanja i optimizma u suočavanju s neuspjesima te je sposobniji odgovoriti na izazove, što u konačnici dovodi do poboljšanja u učenju stranog jezika. Cilj ovog istraživanja je istaknuti odnos između učenja stranog jezika (njemačkog i engleskog) i samoučinkovitosti među studentima preddiplomskih studija sestrinstva, fizioterapije, primaljstva, radiološke tehnologije i sanitarnog inženjerstva na Fakultetu zdravstvenih studija Sveučilišta u Mostaru te utvrditi postoje li razlike u načinu na koji studenti koji uče njemački i engleski jezik percipiraju svoju opću i specifičnu samoučinkovitost u učenju stranog jezika. U istraživanju su sudjelovala 53 studenta preddiplomskog studija na pet smjerova Fakulteta zdravstvenih studija u Mostaru. Primijenjene su dvije ljestvice: Konačna verzija ljestvice Stavova o samoučinkovitosti pri učenju njemačkog jezika te Opća ljestvica za mjerenje samoučinkovitosti. Rezultati nisu pokazali značajne razlike u razinama opće samoučinkovitosti i samoučinkovitosti pri učenju stranog jezika. Studenti Fakulteta zdravstvenih studija pokazuju umjerene razine opće samoučinkovitosti i samoučinkovitosti pri učenju stranog jezika. Rezultati upućuju na potrebu pronalaženja načina za povećanje uvjerenja o samoučinkovitosti kod studenata, pokazujući da oni, neovisno o jeziku koji uče, trebaju poticati svoje sposobnosti i percepciju u učenju stranog jezika.

Ključne riječi: samoučinkovitost, učenje stranih jezika, njemački, engleski

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