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The Mediating Role of Social Support in the Relationship Between General Self-Efficacy and Turkish Language Self-Confidence

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between general self-efficacy and language self-confidence among Turkish as a foreign language (TFL) learners in 2024, with an emphasis on the mediating role of perceived social support. There is a lack of research in the existing literature on the effect of self-efficacy perceptions on language self-confidence. In today's world, the educational environment is rapidly changing; thus a need for a better and more comprehensive understanding of the factors that foster student motivation, positive attitudes toward learning, academic engagement, and learning strategies has emerged. This study aimed to contribute to this understanding by investigating the mediating role of social support in the relationship between general self-efficacy and Turkish language self-confidence among TFL learners. Using a quantitative research approach, a sample of 227 TFL students from Necmettin Erbakan University was used. Data were collected through the administration of three separate scales using multistage cluster sampling. The open source integrated development environment (IDE) Rstudio version 1.4 was used to analyze the data. The results revealed the importance of creating a supportive educational environment that effectively fosters self-efficacy beliefs. Such an environment, in turn, leads to an increase in perceived social support and linguistic self-confidence among TFL learners. The implications of these findings are multifaceted and provide universities with a valuable toolkit for creating strategies and interventions that also aim to nurture important foundations for self-efficacy beliefs. By doing so, these institutions can effectively nurture the linguistic self-confidence of TFL learners and thereby improve their educational experiences and outcomes.

Keywords: *Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language, General Self-Efficacy, Linguistic Self-Confidence, Social Support*

1. Introduction

With the increase in scholarship opportunities provided for foreign students, Turkey is one of the countries preferred by students who want to receive undergraduate and graduate education. The existence of an approximate population of 330,000 students from 180 different countries can be

considered as an indicator of this preference (Migration Research Foundation/ Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, 2024). While there are students who study with the support of their families or by working on their own, there are also foreign students who study with scholarships they receive from various governmental institutions, foundations and associations (Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, Turkey Scholarships, Directorate General of Foundations, Council of Higher Education). In addition, with millions of Syrians who had to leave their country due to the crisis in Syria (Migration Research Foundation, 2024) coming to Turkey as refugees, the importance attached to teaching TFL and the institutions performing this task has increased. In Turkey, the systematic teaching of TFL began with the establishment of the Ankara University Turkish Teaching Application and Research Center (TÖMER) in 1984, and was followed by Turkish teaching centers established at other universities for the teaching of TFL. Students studying at these centers validate their Turkish proficiency up to C1 level with a certificate they receive at the end of the process. Foreign students must certify their C1 level proficiency in order to be admitted to universities in Turkey at both undergraduate and graduate levels. In addition to this requirement, the increase in the number of foreign students in Turkey is parallel to the increase in the number of institutions where Turkish is taught as a foreign language. Individual learner differences are among the most significant indicators of foreign language learning achievement. In addition to individual differences, the environment in which the target language is learned and the sociocultural characteristics of this environment are some of the factors influencing the learning process. Of all these factors, affective characteristics such as attitude, motivation, anxiety, empathy, self-efficacy, and self-confidence together with social support coming from the environment in which the target language is learned are considered to be important variables in language learning (Bai, Chao & Wang, 2019; Dogan, Dogan & Dogan, 2023; Luo, Ahmadi & Izadpanah, 2024; Luan, Hong, Cao, Dong & Hou, 2020; Maclntyre & Gardner, 1991; Moskowitz, 1999; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Rossiter, 2003; Wu & Lin, 2023; Zhang, 2021).

1.1 General Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in himself/herself in order to succeed in any task, and this belief is stronger and more effective than the individual's own competencies in accomplishing the task (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1997). General self-efficacy is defined as “the belief in one’s competence to cope with a broad range of stressful or challenging demands” (Scholz and Schwarzer, 2005, p.439). In the same vein, Schunk (1991) states that general self-efficacy is a predictor of an individual's behaviors and has a positive effect on success. General self-efficacy also plays an important role in the foreign language learning process. Studies in the relevant literature show that general self-efficacy is positively and significantly related to foreign language learning success (Dogan et al., 2023; Genc, Kulusakli and Aydin, 2016; Jia, 2022; Moreno and Kilpatrick, 2018; Özdemir and Karanfil, 2017). Although there are studies on the general self-efficacy of those learning TFL (Demirel and Temür, 2023; Erdil, 2017; Güngör and Kan, 2020; Hamzadayı and Büyükikiz, 2015; Melanlıoğlu and Atalay, 2016; Şengül, 2018; Tay and Kahtalı, 2023; Yaman and Tulumcu, 2016), no study has been found in the literature that studies general self-efficacy and language self-confidence as interrelated variables in the TFL process.

1.2 *Linguistic Self-Confidence*

Linguistic self-confidence refers to an individual's perception their own communicative competence and includes an individual's subjective assessment of their ability to use a language accurately and fluently (Boz, 2020; Yashima, 2002). Linguistic self-confidence has a direct effect on productive language skills, and a lack of linguistic self-confidence negatively affects the development of language skills (Jamila, 2014; Muqorrobin, Bindarti & Sundari, 2022; Nadila, 2021). In a study conducted with Japanese high school students learning English as a foreign language (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide &

Shimizu, 2004), it was found that students who lacked self-confidence in language learning had difficulty communicating with people in English. Similarly, Ghafar (2023) found that those who were highly self-confident in their language skills are more likely to learn a second language and speak it well. Other studies in the literature also reveal that there is a significant relationship between linguistic self-confidence and learning a foreign language and communicating in that language (Abdullah, Hussin, Hammad & Ismail, 2021; Al-Murtadha, 2020; Alberth, 2023; Ghanbarpour, 2016; Lubis, Lubis & Purba, 2020; Xu, 2011).

1.3 *The Relationship between General Self-Efficacy and Linguistic Self-Confidence*

There is an indirect relationship between general self-efficacy and linguistic self-confidence. What makes this relationship indirect are the mediating factors. Motivation, learning strategies, social interaction, and social support in the context of social interaction can be listed among these mediating factors (Li, J., Wang, Zhao & Li, 2023; Luszczynska, Gutiérrez-Doña & Schwarzer, 2005; Milivojevic, 2014). High levels of general self-efficacy increase the individual's motivation to learn the language. An individual with high motivation exerts more effort in the face of difficulties in the language learning process, and this may lead to an increase in linguistic self-confidence. Individuals with high levels of general self-efficacy are more successful in developing their own learning strategies. This success enables a more effective understanding of the ontologically difficult features in language learning. An individual's feeling of control over the language learning process increases their level of linguistic self-confidence. In addition, there is a connection between linguistic self-confidence and anxiety level. A high level of general self-efficacy perception is a factor that reduces the individual's anxiety in the language learning process. Decreased anxiety provides the individual with comfort in the performance of productive language skills. This is a factor that increases the individual's self-confidence. Individuals with high general self-efficacy act with less hesitation by taking a more active role in language learning environments that require social interaction. The individual develops a stronger linguistic self-confidence with the support he receives from his environment. (Basereh and Pishkar, 2016; Nasimi, Tavakoli & Rezazadeh, 2024; Zarei and Naghdi, 2017).

1.4 *The Mediating Role of Social Support*

Social support is defined as any kind of help and encouragement that an individual receives from their environment (Gurung, 2010). This help and encouragement contribute to the individual's development of a coping strategy for the difficulties they encounter (Danielsen, Samdal, Hetland & Wold, 2009; Roohafza, Afshar, Keshteli, Mohammadi, Feizi, Taslimi & Adibi, 2014). Benefactors who provide social support in language learning are teachers, family members, peers, and language learning clubs. The social support an individual receives can increase motivation in the language learning process, reduce anxiety levels, and increase linguistic self-confidence (Huang, Eslami & Hu, 2010; Jin & Dewaele, 2018; Kojima, 2020). Social support plays a mediating role in an individual's language learning process. The social support that individuals with high self-efficacy receive enables them to participate more actively in the language learning process. With the effect of this social support, individuals develop stronger linguistic self-confidence in the face of the difficulties and uncertainties they encounter. This mediating role of social support increases both self-efficacy perceptions and linguistic self-confidence. Studies display that high levels of social support significantly increase linguistic self-confidence and general success levels (Jia and Cheng, 2022; Luan, Hong, Cao, Dong & Hou, 2020; Kalsoom, Soomro & Pathan, 2020; Vatankhah and Tanbakooei, 2014; Zhang, 2020).

This literature review highlights the indirect and complex relations between general self-efficacy, linguistic self-confidence, and social support in the context of university students learning TFL. Understanding these relationships is important to make educational environments more efficient and

to improve students' learning experiences. This research will provide a basis for future studies by shedding light on the mediating role of social support in the relationship between general self-efficacy and linguistic self-confidence. In order to clarify the focus of our research, we present hypotheses that articulate specific relationships and assumptions that guide our research:

1. There is a significant relationship between TFL learners' general self-efficacy perceptions and perceived social support.
2. There is a significant relationship between TFL learners' perceived social support and their linguistic self-confidence.
3. The effect of general self-efficacy on TFL learners' linguistic self-confidence is mediated perceived social support.

2. Method

2.1 Study Design

The current study has a quantitative and correlational descriptive research design, primarily adopting an exploratory research approach. The data collection methodology for this study is based on quantitative techniques with a special focus on scales. The use of scales facilitates the collection of quantitative data, providing a rigorous and systematic approach to data collection. As can be seen in Figure 1, the study focuses on the mediating role of social support in the relationship between general self-efficacy and linguistic self-confidence.

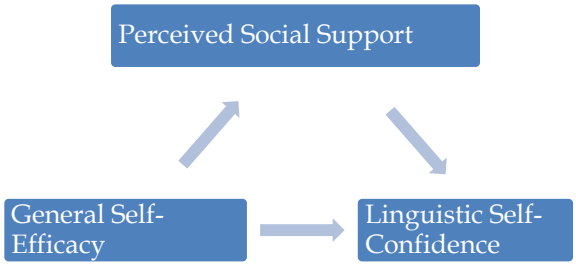

Figure 1: Conceptual model

2.2 Participants and Sampling

The sample of the study consists of international students who continue their education at the TÖMER of a university in Turkey in the 2022-2023 academic year. The convenience sampling method, which aims at accessibility, was used in the selection of participants. The criterion for including the participants in the sample was for them to have been learning Turkish for at least three months (one semester). Based on this, 227 students (107 female and 120 male) were reached. Monte Carlo Simulation was used to calculate the power of the sample (Schoemann et al., 2017). As a result of the A-Posteriori analysis, the power of the sample to calculate the indirect effect was found to be .98. The mean age of the students was 22.37 (SD = 4.87), the average time (months) they spent in Turkey was 13.99 (SD = 21.94), and the average time they continued to learn Turkish was 6.11 (SD = 2.72). The majority of the participants (38.05%) came from countries in Central and East Asia (e.g. Afghanistan, Indonesia, Pakistan, Malaysia). 29.76% of participants came from countries in Africa (e.g. Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana, Zambia), 25.85% from Middle East countries (e.g. Syria, Palestine, Yemen), and 4.39% from countries in Europe (e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Ukraine). The participants came to Turkey from a total of 55 different countries.

2.3 Data Collection Tools

Personal Information Form: It was prepared by the authors to obtain demographic information of the participants. The survey collects information about the participants' age, country, length of stay in Turkey, time spent learning Turkish, satisfaction with living in Turkey and satisfaction with their Turkish language proficiency. *General Self-Efficacy:* The General Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) was used to measure levels of general self-efficacy. This scale aims to measure individuals' perceptions of themselves in coping with difficult situations. The scale consists of 10 items (e.g., "It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals") and a single component. Participants respond to the scale with a 4-point Likert structure between "1 = Not at all true" and "4 = Exactly true". It was reported that the Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient in the sample of 23 countries where the scale was tested ranged between .76 and .90 (Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995). *Perceived Social Support*: In order to measure the social support perceived by the individual from their environment, the short version of the Perceived Social Support Scale adapted by Kliem et al. (2015) was used. This short form consists of 6 items (e.g. "When I am sick, I can ask friends/relatives to handle important things for me without hesitation") and a single component with participants rating the items between "1 = strongly disagree" and "5 = strongly agree". In the study by Kliem et al. (2015), reliability analyses showed a high level of internal consistency with a calculated Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .90 for the scale data. Linguistic Self-Confidence: In order to measure self-confidence in Turkish language use, the English Language Confidence Scale developed by Clément and Baker (2001) was adapted for the Turkish language. Accordingly, the word "Turkish" was used instead of "English" in the items. The scale consists of 6 items in a single component (e.g., "I really believe that I am capable of reading and understanding most texts in Turkish"). The scale has a 6-point Likert structure, and participants score between "1 = Strongly Disagree" and "6 = Strongly Agree." Cronbach's Alpha coefficients (.93 and .94) calculated at two different times with the data of the original scale indicate a good level of internal consistency (Clément & Baker, 2001).

2.4 Data Analysis

Rstudio version 1.4, an open source integrated development environment (IDE), was used to analyze the research data (RStudio Team, 2021). First of all, data distributions, outliers, and descriptive statistics were used to examine the data and assumption checks were made. Based on these procedures, no significant outliers were found in the data. Breusch-Pagan Test was applied to check for the variability of the variances and no heteroscedasticity was found (BP = 2.222, df = 2, p = 0.329). In the main analysis of the data, the bootstrap method, which is resistant to the assumption of normality, was used to overcome problems related to normality in the data (Kline, 2011). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated to check the internal consistency of the data. Hayes' (2020) 4th Model was used for mediation analysis and the analysis was performed with PROCESS R.

3. Findings

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics.

Table 1: Spearman correlations and other descriptive statistics

	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	22.37	4.87		.198**					
2. Age	7.99	1.87		-.011	-				

					.067				
3. Satisfaction with life in Turkey	7.15	2.24		.057	-.116	.577***			
4. Satisfaction with Turkish proficiency	3.59	0.79	.79	-.029	-.030	.195**	.229***		
5. Perceived social support	3.20	0.50	.85	.031	.071	.117	.148*	.283***	
6. General Self Efficacy	4.03	1.15	.93	-.016	-.120	.206***	.349***	.224***	.166*
7. Linguistic Self-Confidence	22.37	4.87		.198**					
Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.									

Table 2 shows the calculated coefficients and significance levels of the model created as a result of the research hypotheses. First of all, both the mediator model ($F(1,225) = 28.125$, $p < .001$) and the dependent variable model ($F(2,224) = 7.311$, $p < .001$) are statistically significant. The coefficients of the model show that general self-efficacy positively predicts perceived social support (β = 0.529, 95% CI[0.332, 0.725]) and perceived social support positively predicts linguistic self-confidence (β = 0.295, 95% CI[0.100, 0.489).

Table 2: Model coefficients and confidence intervals

					95 % CI	
	B	Beta	SE	T	lower	upper
Mediator Model (DV: Social Support)						
Constant	1.904		.322	5.903***	1.268	2.539
General Self Efficacy	0.529	.333	.099	5.303***	0.332	0.725
R	.33		R-squared		.11	
F(1,225) = 28.125, p < .001						
Dependent variable model (DV: Linguistic Self-Confidence)						
Constant	2.346		.513	4.571***	1.335	3.357
General Self Efficacy	0.196	.086	.156	1.254	-0.112	0.505
Social Support	0.295	.205	.098	2.98**	0.100	0.489
R	.25		R-squared		.06	
F(2,224) = 7.311, p < .001						
Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001. β represents the unstandardized coefficients, and Beta represents the standardized coefficients.						

Table 3 shows the direct, indirect and total effects of general self-efficacy on linguistic self-confidence in the model. Based on the findings, while general self-efficacy does not directly predict linguistic self-confidence (β = 0.196, 95% CI[-0.112, 0.505]), it significantly predicts linguistic self-confidence positively through perceived social support (β = 0.156, 95% CI[0.042, 0.291]). Although the direct effect is insignificant, the significance of the indirect effect shows that perceived social support acts as a full mediator in the model; or in other words, the model is an indirect-only mediation model (Zhao et al., 2010). The total effect of the model is significant (β = 0.352, 95% CI[0.056, 0.648]). As a result, it is seen that the general self-efficacy perceived by international students is positively related to their perception of social support, which indirectly predicts their linguistic self-confidence.

Table 3: Direct, indirect and total effects

				95 % CI	
	β	Beta	SE	lower	upper
Direct Effect					
General Self Efficacy -> Linguistic Self-Confidence	0.196	.086	.156	-0.112	0.505
Indirect Effect					
General Self Efficacy -> Perceived Social Support -> Linguistic Self-Confidence	0.156*	.068	.028	0.042	0.291
Total Effect	0.352*	.154	.15	0.056	0.648
Note. * p < .05. β represents the unstandardized coefficients, and Beta represents the standardized coefficients.					

4. Discussion

There is a significant relationship between TFL learners' general self-efficacy perceptions and perceived social support. The hypothesis states that there is a significant relationship between the general self-efficacy and the perceived social support of TFL learners. In order to evaluate this hypothesis, it is important to discuss the existing research and present an analysis of the findings. Several studies have investigated the relationship between the general self-efficacy and the perceived social support of university students learning foreign language and have supported the hypothesis (Tang and Zhu, 2024; Wei, 2024; Huang, 2023). The explanation for this relationship is the role of self-efficacy perceptions in providing support from family, peers, teachers and other environments. Students' high belief in their ability to succeed can increase their motivation and allow them to act more assertively in terms of receiving the social support they need in the process (Bagci, 2018; Song, Bong, Lee & Kim, 2015; Wentzel, Battle, Russell & Looney, 2010).

General self-efficacy is the belief that the student can cope with the difficulties they encounter in the learning process and is a predictor of the student's behavior (Scholz & Schwarzer, 2005; Schunk, 1991), which can be effective in displaying the necessary behaviors to overcome difficulties. These behaviors can sometimes be related to the needed social support. In addition, individual differences such as personality types and traits, cultural factors, and previous experiences may be effective in changing the degree of relationship between general self-efficacy and perceived social support (Erzen & Ozabaci, 2023; Mak & Tran, 2001; Lin, Wolke, Schneider, & Margraf, 2020). *2. There is a significant relationship between TFL learners' perceived social support and their linguistic self-confidence.n*It was found that there is a significant relationship between the perceived social support of TFL learners and their linguistic self-confidence as an inquiry about the potential truth of the second hypothesis. Studies have investigated the relationship between social support and linguistic self-confidence and have provided evidence supporting the hypothesis (Hummel, 2013; Feyli and Ayatollahi, 2016; Villegas-Puyod, Sharma, Ajah, Chaisanrit & Skuldee, 2020; Wu, Marek & Yen, 2012). It has been found that social support from both the social environment and social networks has a significant and positive relationship with linguistic self-confidence. When language learners perceive higher levels of social support from their peers, instructors and family members, this provides them with a safer perception of the environment and increases their linguistic self-confidence. It is possible to explain this relationship with the role of social support in promoting positive psychological and emotional states. Language learners with a strong support system are more likely to experience positive emotions such as confidence, low anxiety, high motivation, engagement, and a sense of purpose in their academic endeavors, and fewer negative emotions than their peers (Oxford, 2015). In addition, the role of social support in reducing stress and feelings of isolation can lead to either increased or decreased linguistic self-confidence. When language learners feel supported, they are more likely to strive to cope with

academic challenges and maintain connections with support elements, and this effort supports their linguistic self-confidence (Wang & Sheikh). Social support provides language learners with a sense of belonging and security, and these feelings also contribute to linguistic self-confidence. In addition, language learners who receive support from their peers and teachers are more likely to have high linguistic self-confidence to actively participate in collaboration and teamwork and fulfill their responsibilities (Dörnyei, 1997; Oxford, 1997). However, the relationship between social support and linguistic self-confidence may vary depending on some individual and environmental factors. Accessing social support may be difficult due to cultural differences. For example, the power distance range in the cultural codes of the society may be decisive in this regard. Personality traits and previous experiences may moderate the relationship between social support and linguistic self-confidence (Fatima, Ismail, Pathan, & Memon, 2020; Liu, 2012; Liu & Zhang, 2008). *3. The effect of general self-efficacy on TFL learners' linguistic self-confidence is mediated perceived social support.*

Regarding the third hypothesis, it investigates whether general self-efficacy significantly affects linguistic self-confidence through the mediating role of perceived social support of TFL learners.

Social support refers to the resources, assistance, and emotional benefits that individuals receive from their social networks, such as family, friends, and peers. Linguistic self-confidence reflects students' personal assessments of their competence in using the language correctly and effectively without anxiety. Additionally, general self-efficacy beliefs refer to language learners' belief in their ability to successfully perform tasks and achieve desired outcomes.Although there are studies focusing on the effects of characteristics such as general self-efficacy, attitude, and motivation on different variables through the mediating role of social support (Dong, Jamal Mohammed, Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim, Rezai, 2022; Giladi, Koslowsky, & Davidovitch, 2022; Pan, 2020), no study has been found focusing on the effect of general self-efficacy on linguistic self-confidence through the mediating role of social support. Therefore, both the arguments and the findings in the literature on the indirect relationship between general self-efficacy and linguistic self-confidence may be useful in explaining the indirect relationship confirmed in this hypothesis.*Indirect Relationship*: These are the mediating factors that make the relationship between general self-efficacy and linguistic self-confidence indirect. It can be said that these mediating factors are motivation, learning styles, and social interaction. The higher the level of general self-efficacy perception, the higher the probability that the level of these mediating factors will be. Since the level of these mediating factors is directly related to the level of linguistic self-confidence, it is possible to say that the relationship between general self-efficacy and linguistic self-confidence becomes indirect with the mediating role of social support.*Mediating Role of Social Support*: Social support acts as a mediator in the relationship between general self-efficacy and linguistic self-confidence. General self-efficacy perception expresses the belief that one has the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful. A high level of this belief increases the levels of attitude, motivation, learning strategies and social interaction, while decreasing the level of anxiety, which contributes to the development of linguistic self-confidence. Social support acts as a tool through which general self-efficacy affects linguistic self-confidence.However, it should not be ignored that individual differences and contextual factors may also be determinants in the relationship between self-efficacy, social support and linguistic self-confidence. Factors such as the quality of social relationships, cultural norms and the diversity of support systems can affect the level of effectiveness of social support in developing self-efficacy and linguistic self-confidence. Additionally, personal characteristics, prior experiences, and other academic-related factors may shape individuals' perceptions of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the mediating role of social support and the effect of general self-efficacy on linguistic self-confidence. The findings reveal the significant relationship between general self-efficacy

and social support; and between social support and linguistic self-confidence. In addition, the role of perceived social support as a mediator in the effect of general self-efficacy on linguistic self-confidence is revealed. The results of the study confirm the significant relationship between general self-efficacy and social support. General self-efficacy perception is directly related to the level of perceived social support. Students who believe that they are sufficient to succeed can act in accordance with the necessity and importance of receiving help in overcoming difficulties.

Another result reveals the existence of a significant relationship between social support and linguistic self-confidence. As the level of support language learners receive from their families, friends, peers, teachers and other environments increases, it strengthens their sense of belonging and makes them feel secure. Thus, it encourages the development of their linguistic self-confidence.

Social support acts as a mediator between general self-efficacy and linguistic self-confidence. Self-efficacy beliefs affect their linguistic self-confidence through the mediation of social support. In conclusion, while self-efficacy perception acts as a pathway for developing linguistic self-confidence, social support acts as a crossroads. Understanding and addressing the factors contributing to perceived social support can lead to the provision of enriching learning environments that foster linguistic self-confidence and improved performance and perceived social support.

6. Theoretical and Practical Suggestions

1. Research on a non-student sample can examine the relevance of the presented relationship.
2. Further studies addressing linguistic self-confidence, an abstract concept, in relation with different constructs can reveal its different functions in the learning process.
3. Perceived social support may somewhat differ from actual support, and it is recommended that future research use methods that include observing people in their interactions with their social networks to measure the accuracy of social support perceptions.
4. According to the current research findings, it can be suggested that language learners' self-efficacy perceptions be increased, thereby increasing their perceptions of social support and linguistic self-confidence.
5. Future studies may approach the subject differently. They can use strategies such as observation, journaling, and interviews. The relationship between the variables can be examined using models that include other affective variables such as attitude, motivation, and anxiety.

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