Arab World English Journal
INTERNATIONAL PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL ISSN: 2229-9327

Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Special Issue on CALL Number 11. July 2025 Pp.380 -392
DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/call11.23

Navigating Online Language Learning: The Impact of Self-Efficacy and Self-Regulation on Student Success

Abdulaziz Althewini
College of Science and Health Professions, King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences, & King Abdullah International Medical Research Center (KAIMRC). Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
E-mail: thewinia@ksau-hs.edu.sa

Received:0/5/05/2025 Accepted:07/08/2025 Published: 07/29/2025

Abstract
This qualitative study examines the role of self-efficacy and self-regulation in shaping the academic experiences of students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in online education. The primary objective is to investigate how learners' beliefs in their capabilities and their use of self-regulatory strategies impact engagement and persistence in digital language learning environments. The study is significant in addressing how psychological factors interact with online learning dynamics—particularly in EFL contexts where learner autonomy is crucial. It further asks: How do EFL students' self-efficacy and self-regulation influence their motivation and engagement in online language courses? Through virtual semi-structured interviews with four undergraduate EFL students enrolled in online language courses, the study examines how learners perceive their capabilities, manage their learning, and respond to the challenges of online environments. Thematic analysis revealed four key themes: confidence through past success, self-motivation and goal setting, coping with isolation and lack of structure, and help-seeking and peer comparison. Findings indicate that students with high self-efficacy are more likely to adopt effective self-regulatory strategies, which in turn promote academic engagement and persistence. The role of social presence emerged as a critical factor, mediating the impact of isolation and enhancing student motivation through peer interaction. The study also underscores the importance of task value and social connection in sustaining learner engagement. Practical recommendations are offered to help educators design online learning experiences that foster student confidence, autonomy, and success in EFL contexts.
Keywords: Language learning, Learner motivation, Online learning, Qualitative study, Self-efficacy, Self-regulation, Student engagement.

Cite as: Althewini, A. (2025). Navigating Online Language Learning: The Impact of Self-Efficacy and Self-Regulation on Student Success. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Special Issue on CALL (11)* :380 -392 https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/call11.23

Introduction

In recent years, online education has rapidly become a central component of higher education systems worldwide. Advances in technology and the demand for flexible, accessible learning options have contributed to the increasing popularity of online courses (Prifti, 2022; Zheng & Xiao, 2024; Lim et al., 2021; Botsch & Botsch, 2012). For many students, online learning offers greater control over their schedules and personalized pathways for academic growth. However, this shift in instructional delivery also presents new challenges. Without the structure of traditional classrooms, students are expected to take more responsibility for managing their learning, staying motivated, and completing tasks independently (Wang et al., 2022; Chang & Tsai, 2022; Yi et al., 2024).

Given this shift, it is crucial to understand the skills and attributes that enable students to succeed in online environments. Previous research has consistently shown that self-efficacy and self-regulation are among the strongest predictors of academic achievement (Zheng & Xiao, 2024; Getenet et al., 2024; Stephen & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2021; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Zimmerman, 2002). In the context of language learning, self-efficacy refers to a student's belief in their ability to acquire and use a new language effectively, while self-regulation involves strategic behaviors to manage one's language development. These may include setting vocabulary acquisition goals, engaging in informal digital language learning environments (IDLE), allocating time for speaking practice, managing resources such as grammar tools or language apps, and seeking feedback from peers or instructors (Wang et al., 2022; Chang & Tsai, 2022; Artino & Stephens, 2007; Caprara et al., 2008). Such self-regulatory strategies are particularly crucial in online and blended language learning settings, where learner autonomy and motivation play a significantly greater role.

In the context of online education, these skills become even more crucial. Students who believe in their abilities and regularly apply self-regulatory strategies tend to perform better and report higher satisfaction with online learning (Chang & Tsai, 2022; Yi et al., 2024; Bandura, 2002; Joo, Bong, & Choi, 2000). In contrast, students with low self-efficacy often struggle to maintain consistent study habits or overcome challenges independently, which can result in lower academic performance (Zheng & Xiao, 2024; Lim et al., 2021; Whipp & Chiarelli, 2004).

Although many studies have used quantitative tools such as surveys and scales to examine the relationship between self-efficacy, self-regulation, and academic success, there is still a need to explore students' real-life experiences with these concepts—especially in the field of language learning, where motivation, confidence, and persistence play a critical role. Understanding how students personally experience and apply self-efficacy and self-regulatory behaviors in their online studies can provide deeper insight into how these constructs function beyond numerical data.

To address this gap, the present study employs a qualitative approach, conducting in-depth virtual interviews with four language learning students enrolled in online courses. This method enables a more detailed examination of their perspectives, challenges, and strategies. By focusing on their voices, the study aims to uncover how self-efficacy and self-regulation support or hinder their academic journeys in online environments. The findings of this study may contribute to better instructional design, student support practices, and training programs that enhance learners' ability to thrive in online education.

Accordingly, this study seeks to explore how language learners perceive and experience self-efficacy and self-regulation in the context of online education. It aims to understand the specific strategies students use to manage their language learning, including how they stay

motivated, overcome obstacles, and take ownership of their progress in virtual settings. A particular focus is placed on how learners utilize self-regulatory practices such as time and resource management and goal-setting, and how these are shaped by their beliefs in their own capabilities. Guided by these aims, the study investigates the following research questions:

1. How do language learners perceive their self-efficacy in navigating online language courses?
2. What self-regulation strategies do students employ to support their learning in virtual environments?
3. What challenges do they face in sustaining motivation and managing their learning independently?
4. How do students describe the relationship between their beliefs (self-efficacy) and their use of self-regulation strategies in achieving language learning goals?

These questions are designed to illuminate the lived experiences of learners and generate insights that may inform more effective pedagogical support in digital language education contexts.

Literature Review

Self-Efficacy in Academic Contexts

Self-efficacy, a core concept developed by Albert Bandura, refers to an individual's belief in their ability to perform specific tasks and achieve desired outcomes. It is not simply a general sense of confidence, but a task-specific judgment that influences how people think, feel, and behave in different situations (Bandura, 2002). In the context of education, self-efficacy significantly shapes students' motivation, learning strategies, persistence in the face of challenges, and ultimately, academic achievement.

Bandura (1997) identifies four primary sources that contribute to the development of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. These sources interact with each other to form a learner's perception of their own capabilities.

Mastery experiences are considered the most powerful source of self-efficacy. When learners succeed in completing a task, their belief in their ability is strengthened. These successful experiences serve as concrete evidence that they can overcome similar challenges in the future. Conversely, repeated failure—especially in the absence of effective coping strategies—can weaken self-efficacy and lead to avoidance behavior (Chang & Tsai, 2022; Prifti, 2022; Saks, 2024).

Vicarious experiences shape efficacy beliefs through social comparison. Observing peers or role models who are similar in age, background, or ability succeed at a task can increase the observer's belief that they too can succeed. This form of social learning is particularly influential when the learner lacks direct experience with the task or environment, as is often the case in new learning formats such as online education (Chang et al., 2022; Stephen & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

Verbal persuasion and social influences involve encouraging feedback from others, such as teachers, peers, or family members, who express confidence in a learner's abilities. This source of self-efficacy is less robust in strength compared to mastery experiences, but it can be effective—especially when combined with guidance and realistic goals. Encouragement helps reduce self-doubt and can serve as a motivational push in moments of uncertainty (Stephen & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

Physiological and affective states also play a role. Learners often interpret physical reactions—like anxiety, stress, or fatigue—as signs of potential failure. A student who experiences anxiety before a test may interpret this as a lack of preparedness, even if they are well-equipped to perform. Learning to recognize and reframe these states can help students maintain a healthier sense of self-efficacy (Chang et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022).

Overall, students with high self-efficacy tend to approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than threats to be avoided. They are more likely to persist through setbacks, adopt effective learning strategies, and engage more deeply in their educational experiences. In online learning environments—where independent study, digital tools, and fewer direct social interactions are common—these beliefs become especially important in influencing academic outcomes.

Self-Regulation in Learning

Self-regulation is a central process that enables learners to manage their own academic behavior, thoughts, and emotions in pursuit of personal and educational goals. It involves deliberate planning, monitoring, and adjusting of learning strategies to optimize performance. Unlike passive learning, where students wait for direction, self-regulated learners take initiative, reflect on their progress, and modify their approach when necessary (Zheng & Xiao, 2024; Getenet et al., 2024; Stephen & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2021; Gazzaniga, Heatherton, & Halpern, 2010; Zimmerman, 2000).

The process of self-regulated learning typically begins with setting clear and achievable goals. These goals help students define what they want to accomplish and create a sense of direction. As students begin working toward these goals, they continuously monitor their progress, asking themselves whether their current efforts are effective. If they find that their strategies are not helping them achieve the desired outcome, they can adapt by trying different methods. This willingness to change and improve is a key feature of successful self-regulated learners, who view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles to be avoided (Getenet et al., 2024; Stephen & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2021).

Research by Zimmerman (2002) highlights several interconnected skills that are essential to the self-regulation process. These include the ability to set short-term, meaningful goals, to apply effective learning strategies, and to track performance through self-observation. Learners also benefit from creating a supportive learning environment by organizing their study spaces, managing their time efficiently, and limiting distractions. After completing tasks, they engage in self-reflection, evaluating what worked and what did not, and adjusting their methods for future learning situations. These skills are not fixed traits but can be developed over time through practice and awareness.

Motivation plays a critical role in self-regulation. Students who are motivated to achieve often take greater responsibility for their learning and put more effort into applying self-regulation strategies. This motivation is often influenced by self-efficacy—how much students believe in their own ability to succeed. When students feel capable, they are more likely to stay focused, persevere through difficulties, and maintain high levels of engagement. Conversely, low self-efficacy can result in avoidance, procrastination, and a tendency to give up when faced with setbacks (Wang et al., 2022; Chang & Tsai, 2022; Yi et al., 2024).

A particularly important component of self-regulated learning is self-monitoring. Through self-monitoring, students can observe their progress in real-time and evaluate the effectiveness of

the strategies they are using. This feedback loop reinforces their sense of control and enables them to make informed decisions about how to proceed. When students recognize that their efforts are leading to improvement, their belief in their own ability increases, which in turn enhances motivation and promotes further learning. In this way, self-regulation and self-efficacy are closely linked, each reinforcing the other.

In online education, self-regulation becomes even more critical. The lack of regular in-person interaction with instructors, peers, and structured classroom routines means that students must rely heavily on their own ability to organize, plan, and stay on track. Those who possess strong self-regulation skills are more likely to succeed in managing deadlines, staying engaged with course materials, and overcoming distractions. For language learners, this is especially important, as language acquisition often requires sustained attention, consistent practice, and a high level of internal motivation. Understanding how these learners apply self-regulation strategies in online contexts provides valuable insight into the support structures and interventions that may enhance academic performance in digital environments.

Self-Efficacy and Self-Regulation in Online Learning

According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy and self-regulation are closely connected. When students believe they are capable of achieving a task (high self-efficacy), they are more likely to take initiative, remain focused, and use effective learning strategies (high self-regulation). On the other hand, students who doubt their abilities often lack the motivation or persistence needed to stay engaged with their learning, which can lead to poor academic outcomes. In this way, a learner's belief in their own abilities directly influences how they approach tasks and how much effort they are willing to invest.

Although the exact timing and order of influence between self-efficacy and self-regulation remain an area for further study, many researchers agree that the two constructs are strongly linked and often reinforce each other. Learners who are confident in their academic abilities tend to adopt more effective self-regulatory behaviors, such as goal setting, time management, and self-monitoring. These behaviors, in turn, lead to better performance and reinforce their belief in their own capabilities.

In online language learning, metacognitive strategies—such as self-evaluating pronunciation through audio recordings or tracking reading fluency—play a critical role in fostering learner autonomy. These practices require students to reflect on their performance, identify areas for improvement, and adjust their learning tactics accordingly. Equally important is resource management, including scheduling dedicated time for speaking practice or using language apps strategically. Self-efficacy and self-regulation are deeply interconnected in this process: students who believe in their ability to learn are more likely to engage in self-regulatory behaviors, while successful self-regulation reinforces their confidence, creating a cyclical, mutually reinforcing loop.

Pintrich and De Groot (1990) provided early evidence supporting this connection. Their research showed that students with higher self-efficacy and a strong sense of task value were more likely to use cognitive and metacognitive strategies effectively. These strategies included planning how to approach learning tasks, keeping track of their understanding, and making adjustments when they encountered difficulties. The results showed that self-regulated learners not only performed better on quizzes and written assignments but also demonstrated higher engagement and persistence in their studies.

Recent studies have shown that self-efficacy and self-regulation are closely linked and often work together to influence student success in online learning environments (Culp-Roche et al., 2021; Chang et al., 2022; Hu et al., 2024; Chang & Tsai, 2022; Prifti, 2022; Saks, 2024). They found that students who believed in their ability to use self-regulated learning strategies—such as setting goals, managing time, and staying focused—also tended to have strong academic self-efficacy and confidence in using the internet for learning. These factors were not only related to each other but also connected to students' performance on standardized tests. This highlights the importance of both self-belief and the actual use of strategies in shaping academic outcomes in web-based courses.

These studies also pointed out that self-efficacy beliefs are not fixed; rather, they change depending on the task and context. This means that students may feel confident in one learning environment but unsure in another. Similarly, the self-regulation strategies students use can vary depending on the course structure, the tools provided, and the expectations set by the instructor (Bandura, 1997; Whipp & Chiarelli, 2004). In online settings—where learning often requires more independence and digital engagement—these factors become even more critical.

However, not all research agrees on the direct impact of self-efficacy and self-regulation on academic performance. For instance, Siegle et al. (2005) conducted a broader study on gifted students and found that simply teaching study skills and time management strategies did not significantly improve grades, even for students who reported struggling in those areas. Interestingly, students who participated in programs that helped them feel more connected to school and engaged with the content showed the most improvement in academic performance. This suggests that fostering emotional engagement and creating meaningful learning experiences may sometimes have a stronger effect on success than skill training alone.

These varying findings reflect a complex reality: while self-efficacy and self-regulation are important, their influence can be shaped by context, teaching style, student motivation, and emotional connection to learning. This complexity is especially relevant in online learning, where students often work in isolation and face unique challenges.

In response to this, many researchers have developed tools to measure these skills more accurately in digital environments. One such tool is the Online Academic Success Indicators Scale (OASIS), which is specifically designed to assess student self-efficacy and self-regulation in online courses (Caprara et al., 2008; Debowski et al., 2001; Yukselturk & Bulut, 2007). While such scales provide valuable quantitative data, they may not fully capture the personal experiences and challenges students face when navigating online learning spaces. This highlights the need for qualitative research that gives voice to students' individual journeys and sheds light on how self-efficacy and self-regulatory strategies are actually used in practice.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how language learning students experience and apply self-efficacy and self-regulatory strategies in online learning environments. A qualitative approach was selected to capture rich, detailed insights into students' lived experiences—insights that are often not accessible through quantitative instruments. This method enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of how learners perceive their own capabilities, manage challenges, and maintain motivation in online academic settings.

Participants

Four undergraduate students, all currently enrolled in online language learning courses, were invited to participate in this study. The sample included both male and female students with diverse academic performance levels and varying degrees of online learning experience. Some of them excelled in their language learning, whereas others did not. All participants had completed at least one full semester of online coursework, which allowed them to reflect on their experiences with some depth and maturity.

Data collection and analysis

Data was collected through virtual semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and followed a flexible interview guide. The questions focused on students' perceptions of their academic abilities, how they planned and monitored their learning, how they responded to difficulties, and the strategies they used to stay engaged and motivated in an online learning context.

To analyze the data, this study employed thematic analysis, a widely used method for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. The process began with a thorough reading of all interview transcripts to gain familiarity with the content. Initial codes were developed by highlighting recurring phrases, ideas, or behaviors that related to self-efficacy and self-regulation. These codes were then grouped into broader themes that captured the shared experiences and perspectives of the participants.

Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and effectiveness in uncovering meaningful themes in small-sample, interview-based studies. It allowed the researcher to examine both explicit statements and underlying meanings within the participants' narratives. The process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model: familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, defining and naming themes, and final reporting.

Overall, this methodology facilitated an in-depth examination of how self-efficacy beliefs and self-regulatory behaviors impact student engagement and success in online language learning. The findings provide practical insights that can inform more supportive instructional practices and learner development strategies in online education contexts.

Results

Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed four key themes that reflect how language learning students experience and apply self-efficacy and self-regulatory behaviors in online education: (1) Confidence through Past Success, (2) Self-Motivation and Goal Setting, (3) Coping with Isolation and Lack of Structure, and (4) Help-Seeking and Peer Comparison. Each theme highlights a different dimension of how students navigate the demands of online language learning—such as managing speaking anxiety, maintaining vocabulary routines, or staying engaged in asynchronous lessons—and how their beliefs in their language abilities (self-efficacy) and use of self-regulation strategies (e.g., setting grammar goals, scheduling pronunciation practice) shape their academic engagement and language development.

Confidence through Past Success

All participants expressed that their belief in their ability to succeed in online learning was shaped by previous academic experiences. Students who had performed well in past language courses—particularly in online or hybrid settings—felt more capable of handling current

challenges. One student shared, *"When I passed my first online class, I started believing that I can do this on my own. That experience gave me confidence."* These mastery experiences aligned with Bandura's (1997) theory, which posits that successful performance strengthens self-efficacy. Students with limited success in the past, however, described feeling more hesitant and experiencing greater self-doubt *when* facing difficult tasks.

Self-Motivation and Goal Setting

The ability to set goals and stay motivated emerged as a central factor in how students managed their language learning. Most participants described using personal goals to stay on track, especially in the absence of strict deadlines or regular teacher follow-up. For instance, one student explained, *"I always set a weekly plan. If I don't do that, I lose focus and get lazy."* Goal-setting was often linked to long-term aspirations, such as improving English for career advancement or passing official language proficiency exams. The findings suggest that students with clearer goals are more likely to engage in self-regulated behaviors, such as time management and task prioritization.

Coping with Isolation and Lack of Structure

A major challenge identified by participants was the sense of isolation and the lack of immediate feedback from language instructors in online classes. Several students reported feeling disconnected from the learning process, which sometimes led to a decrease in motivation. One participant noted, *"Sometimes I don't feel like I'm in a real class. It's just me and the screen, and that can be hard to push through."* Those with higher self-efficacy were more proactive in creating structure for themselves—such as setting specific language study times, organizing their workspace, and using digital tools to track progress—whereas students with lower self-efficacy were more likely to fall behind.

Help-Seeking and Peer Comparison

Another recurring theme was the importance of peer interaction in shaping both self-efficacy and learning strategies. Students often evaluated their own progress by comparing themselves to classmates, especially when discussing shared assignments or test results. One student said, *"When I see others doing well, I feel like I can do it too. But if everyone is struggling, I think maybe it's not just me."* This reflects the role of vicarious experiences in building or weakening self-efficacy. Help-seeking was also a key self-regulatory strategy, with students reaching out to peers or instructors when they felt stuck. However, not all participants felt comfortable asking for help, particularly in online settings where communication felt less personal.

Together, these themes provide a deeper understanding of the psychological and behavioral factors that influence student success in online language learning environments. They reveal that self-efficacy and self-regulation are not fixed traits but are shaped by experiences, social comparison, and the ability to adapt to the demands of digital learning. The results underscore the importance of designing online courses that actively support student motivation, connection, and structure.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide meaningful insight into how language learners experience and apply self-efficacy and self-regulatory behaviors in online learning settings.

Consistent with Bandura's (1997, 2002) theory of social cognitive development, students' beliefs about their academic abilities shaped the way they approached tasks, managed challenges, and sustained effort in an online environment.

The first theme—*Confidence through Past Success*—supports Bandura's (1997) argument that mastery experiences are the strongest source of self-efficacy. Students who had succeeded in similar learning environments before felt more capable of handling the challenges of online coursework. This belief in their ability acted as a motivational driver, encouraging them to stay engaged and push through difficulties. As students accumulate positive learning experiences, their confidence grows, which in turn strengthens their willingness to take on new tasks and regulate their learning more effectively (Chang & Tsai, 2022; Prifti, 2022; Saks, 2024).

The second theme—*Self-Motivation and Goal Setting*—demonstrates the close link between self-efficacy and self-regulated learning. According to Zimmerman (1998, 2000), the process of self-regulation begins with goal setting, a step highly influenced by students' belief in their ability to succeed. Participants in this study who reported strong self-efficacy were more likely to set personal goals, organize their study time, and monitor their progress. This aligns with previous research suggesting that self-efficacy plays a central role in whether students adopt and maintain learning strategies (Chang et al., 2022; Stephen & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2021; Wang et al., 2022; Artino & Stephens, 2006; Whipp & Chiarelli, 2004).

The third theme—*Coping with Isolation and Lack of Structure*—reflects one of the core difficulties in online education. Students who lacked confidence often found it harder to stay on task without external pressure. Some hesitated to seek help when they needed it, a behavior also reported in earlier studies (Artino & Stephens, 2007; Caprara et al., 2008). In contrast, students with higher self-efficacy viewed obstacles as manageable and were more likely to self-regulate by creating routines and utilizing available resources (Zheng & Xiao, 2024; Getenet et al., 2024; Stephen & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2021).

The fourth theme—*Help-Seeking and Peer Comparison*—reveals how social factors also contribute to self-regulated learning. Observing others succeed appeared to increase participants' belief in their own abilities, supporting Bandura's (1997) notion of vicarious learning. However, students with lower self-efficacy were less likely to ask for help—an important self-regulatory strategy—which may have hindered their academic performance. This finding aligns with earlier research that students with limited confidence often avoid seeking help, despite its potential benefits (Chang & Tsai, 2022; Yi et al., 2024; Artino & Stephens, 2007).

Within these four themes, Informal digital practices—such as using language learning apps like Duolingo or watching English videos on social media—emerged as powerful tools for building both self-efficacy and self-regulation autonomously. These tools enabled learners to practice at their own pace, track their progress, and receive instant feedback, thereby reinforcing their confidence in their language abilities while promoting consistent, self-directed learning habits.

However, differences in self-regulation styles were observed. Some participants demonstrated proactive self-regulation, setting clear goals and adjusting their strategies in advance. Others exhibited reactive self-regulation, modifying their behaviors only after experiencing setbacks—such as failing a vocabulary quiz or falling behind on assignments. This echoes previous findings (e.g., Zimmerman, 2000) that struggling learners often lack the foresight and planning associated with effective SR, highlighting a need for more explicit training in proactive learning habits.

Interestingly, while prior research with language learners emphasized **social presence** and peer interaction as key motivators for help-seeking (Stephen & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2021; Zheng & Xiao, 2024; Getenet et al., 2024), participants in this study displayed a more individualistic pattern. Although they occasionally sought clarification from peers, they primarily relied on self-access resources or instructors. This suggests that in some language learning contexts—especially when learners are confident and digitally literate—autonomy may outweigh the perceived need for constant peer engagement.

Furthermore, an important insight from the study is the role of task value in motivating students to self-regulate. Several participants mentioned being more engaged and persistent when they perceived the course content as relevant to their future goals. Prior research supports this connection—students who value what they are learning are more likely to apply metacognitive strategies and self-regulatory behaviors effectively (Artino & Stephens, 2006; Pintrich, 2000). In online education, however, building this sense of relevance and connection can be more challenging due to limited face-to-face interaction with instructors and peers (Wang et al., 2022; Chang & Tsai, 2022; Yi et al., 2024).

To address this, educators should consider designing coursework that directly connects with students' academic and professional interests. For example, allowing students to choose project topics that align with their career goals or incorporating real-world applications of course content may help foster deeper engagement. Instructors can also enhance students' sense of connection by encouraging reflective tasks that help learners see how course material relates to their personal growth and future opportunities (Prifti, 2022; Zheng & Xiao, 2024; Lim et al., 2021).

The study reinforces the idea that self-efficacy and self-regulation not only predict academic success but also drive the use of essential learning strategies, such as goal setting, time management, and help-seeking. The findings emphasize that fostering both confidence and relevance is critical—especially in online environments where students must take more responsibility for their own learning. Supporting these areas may lead to stronger academic outcomes and more positive experiences for students navigating the digital classroom (Culp-Roche et al., 2021; Chang et al., 2022; Hu et al., 2024).

Recommendations

This study emphasizes the significance of both self-efficacy and self-regulation in supporting online learners, particularly in the context of language education. As online instruction continues to expand, educators and instructional designers must pay close attention to the psychological and behavioral needs of students, ensuring that learning environments are not only accessible but also supportive of students' growth, confidence, and academic success. Based on these insights, several practical recommendations can be made:

1. **Foster Early Success:** Instructors should design online courses with early, achievable tasks to help students build confidence and momentum. Early positive experiences can enhance self-efficacy and encourage deeper engagement throughout the course.

2. **Promote Goal Setting:** Students should be encouraged to set personal learning goals at the beginning of each course. Tools such as learning journals, weekly planners, or reflective assignments can help students monitor their progress and stay motivated.

3. **Enhance Course Relevance:** Instructors can increase students' sense of task value by connecting course material to real-life applications, career pathways, or personal interests. Allowing students some choice in topics or projects can also support intrinsic motivation.

4. **Strengthen Social Connection:** Online learning should not be a solitary experience. Creating opportunities for peer interaction—through discussion forums, group projects, or peer feedback—can support both learning and emotional engagement.

5. **Encourage Help-Seeking:** Teachers should normalize and encourage help-seeking behavior by clearly outlining available support systems, responding promptly to student inquiries, and fostering an open and welcoming communication style.

Conclusion

The study explored how self-efficacy and self-regulation influence the academic experiences of language learning students in online environments. Using a qualitative approach, the research captured the voices of four students and highlighted the ways their beliefs, motivations, and behaviors shaped their engagement and success in virtual coursework. The findings affirmed that self-efficacy plays a foundational role in students' willingness to plan, monitor, and manage their learning—especially in less structured, independent settings like online education. Students with higher self-efficacy were more likely to stay organized, set personal goals, seek help when needed, and persist through difficulties. Conversely, students with lower self-efficacy often struggled with motivation, avoided asking for help, and had difficulty maintaining consistent learning habits.

The results also showed that students' ability to self-regulate was closely tied to their valuation of the course content. When students saw a clear connection between their learning and their personal or career goals, they were more likely to invest effort and use effective strategies. However, the online format presented unique challenges, such as feelings of isolation and reduced interaction with peers and instructors, which sometimes limited students' sense of connection and confidence.

Funding: This research is not funded.
Acknowledgments: Many thanks for all participants in this study. Really appreciate their cooperation and support.
Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
Authenticity: This manuscript is an original work

Artificial Intelligence Statement: AI and AI-assisted technologies were not used.
About the Authors: Dr. Abdulaziz Mohammed Althewini is an Associate Professor at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences and a researcher at King Abdullah International Medical Research Center. His work focuses on medical education, student well-being, and culturally and linguistically responsive academic support. He has authored several peer-reviewed studies on academic advising, admission criteria, and instructional quality in higher education.

References

Artino, A. R., & Stephens, J. M. (2006). Academic motivation and self-regulation: A comparative analysis of undergraduate and graduate students learning online. *The Internet and Higher Education, 9*(1), 1–11.

Artino, A. R., & Stephens, J. M. (2007). Self-regulated learning in online education: A review of the empirical literature. *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning, 4*(6), 3–18.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W.H. Freeman.

Bandura, A. (2002). Social cognitive theory in cultural context. *Applied Psychology, 51*(2), 269–290.

Botsch, C. S., & Botsch, R. E. (2012). *Effective online teaching: Foundations and strategies for student success*. SAGE Publications.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101.

Caprara, G. V., Barbaranelli, C., Steca, P., & Malone, P. S. (2008). Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs as determinants of job satisfaction and students' academic achievement: A study at the school level. *Journal of School Psychology, 44*(6), 473–490.

Chang, C. Y., Panjaburee, P., Lin, H. C., Lai, C. L., & Hwang, G. H. (2022). Effects of online strategies on students' learning performance, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and critical thinking in university online courses. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 1–20.

Chang, Y. C., & Tsai, Y. T. (2022). The effect of university students' emotional intelligence, learning motivation, and self-efficacy on their academic achievement—Online English courses. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*, 818929.

Culp-Roche, A., Hardin-Fanning, F., Tartavoulle, T., Hampton, D., Hensley, A., Wilson, J. L., & Wiggins, A. T. (2021). Perception of online teacher self-efficacy: A multi-state study of nursing faculty pivoting courses during COVID-19. *Nurse Education Today, 106*, 105064.

Getenet, S., Cantle, R., Redmond, P., & Albion, P. (2024). Students' digital technology attitude, literacy, and self-efficacy and their effect on online learning engagement. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 21*(1), 3.

Gazzaniga, M. S., Heatherton, T. F., & Halpern, D. F. (2010). Psychological Science (3rd ed.). New York: W. W. Norton.

Hu, J., Lai, Y., & Yi, X. (2024). Effectiveness of social media-assisted course on learning self-efficacy. *Scientific Reports, 14*(1), 10112.

Joo, Y. J., Bong, M., & Choi, H. J. (2000). Self-efficacy for self-regulated learning, academic self-efficacy, and Internet self-efficacy in web-based instruction. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 48*(2), 5–17.

Lim, J. R. N., Rosenthal, S., Sim, Y. J. M., Lim, Z. Y., & Oh, K. R. (2021). Making online learning more satisfying: The effects of online-learning self-efficacy, social presence, and content structure. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education, 30*(4), 543–556.

McCoy, L. P. (2010). Web-enhanced instruction and learning outcomes. *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 37*(2), 95–99.

Pintrich, P. R. (2000). The role of goal orientation in self-regulated learning. In M. Boekaerts, P. R. Pintrich, & M. Zeidner (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation* (pp. 451–502). Academic Press.

Pintrich, P. R., & De Groot, E. V. (1990). Motivational and self-regulated learning components of classroom academic performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *82*(1), 33–40.

Prifti, R. (2022). Self–efficacy and student satisfaction in the context of blended learning courses. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning, 37*(2), 111–125.

Saks, K. (2024). The effect of self-efficacy and self-set grade goals on academic outcomes. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *15*, 1324007.

Stephen, J. S., & Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. J. (2021). A high-impact practice for online students: The use of a first-semester seminar course to promote self-regulation, self-direction, online learning self-efficacy. *Smart Learning Environments, 8*(1), 6.

Siegle, D., & McCoach, D. B. (2005). Motivating gifted students. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press

Wang, Y., Cao, Y., Gong, S., Wang, Z., Li, N., & Ai, L. (2022). Interaction and learning engagement in online learning: The mediating roles of online learning self-efficacy and academic emotions. *Learning and Individual Differences, 94*, 102128.

Whipp, J. L., & Chiarelli, S. (2004). Self-regulation in a web-based course: A case study. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 52*(4), 5–22.

Yi, S., Zhang, Y., Lu, Y., & Shadiev, R. (2024). Sense of belonging, academic self-efficacy and hardiness: Their impacts on student engagement in distance learning courses. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 55*(4), 1703–1727.

Zheng, Y., & Xiao, A. (2024). A structural equation model of online learning: Investigating self-efficacy, informal digital learning, self-regulated learning, and course satisfaction. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *14*, 1276266.

Zimmerman, B. J. (1998). Academic studying and the development of personal skill: A self-regulatory perspective. *Educational Psychologist, 33*(2–3), 73–86.

Zimmerman, B. J. (2000). Attaining self-regulation: A social cognitive perspective. In M. Boekaerts, P. R. Pintrich, & M. Zeidner (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation* (pp. 13–39). Academic Press.