Irish Language Self-efficacy Beliefs and the Official Languages Act 2003

Shane Barry

Mary Immaculate College

shanebarry81@gmail.com

Abstract

This study assesses the influence of sources of self-efficacy construction on Irish language abilities in civil servants working under the requirements of the *Official Languages Act 2003*. Through a series of focus groups within a Government department, participants with varying abilities and interests in the Irish language were assessed on the determining factors in self-assessing their Irish language skills. It was found that self-efficacy is a more accurate predictor of language beliefs than previous performances for Irish speakers, and that sources such as social persuasion and vicarious experiences have the potential to raise self-efficacy beliefs in non-Irish speakers. It was also found that the *Act* has not led to an increased engagement with the Irish language, but has only resulted in an increased deference to perceived expert language models.

Keywords: *Irish language, Self-efficacy, Civil service, Psycholinguistics, Official Languages Act 2003*

1. Background

The *Official Languages Act 2003* requires public bodies within the Irish State to provide services through both official languages – Irish and English. State agencies are required to publish language schemes – statutory internal language plans demonstrating how Irish services will be incorporated over a 3-year timeframe (Walsh, 2012). The *Act* established the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga (Irish Language Commissioner) to monitor compliance with requirements. The most recent Monitoring Report from An Coimisinéir Teanga (2019) reveals that from the 16 Government departments surveyed, comprising of 21,060 employees, only 551 staff (2.62%) were declared by their departments as being capable of providing services to the public through Irish when required.

As departments have autonomy in establishing criteria for identifying and recruiting Irish speakers (Ó Coisdealbha, personal communication, 2019), this study will investigate how staff in public bodies that have studied the Irish language in school self-assess their Irish language abilities when it comes to complying with the *Official Languages Act 2003*. Self-efficacy provides an appropriate theoretical framework for this study as it represents a key factor in the willingness to engage in domain-related activities i.e. a willingness to use a language (Bruning, Dempsey, Kaufmann, McKim & Zumbrunn, 2013). A theoretical overview of self-efficacy in the second language context will be followed by a summary of the findings from focus group discussions with current civil servants from a Government department. These findings will be framed by Bandura's (1997) four sources of self-efficacy belief constructions. The objective will to be determine the influence of these four sources within the Irish language context.

2. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as 'people's judgement of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances' (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). These judgements are based on context-dependent self-interpretations of an individual's ability to undertake a specific task, and affect aspects of behaviour, including effort, coping mechanisms, resilience, and learning and achievement (Bandura, 2012; Chularut & DeBacker, 2004). As self-efficacy beliefs are based on what the individual believes can be achieved – a judgement that is independent of ability - self-efficacy is a better predictor of performance than previous skills or knowledge (Bandura, 1997). While self-efficacy beliefs are strongly correlated with motivation, they differ in that an individual with high self-efficacy beliefs may not value the perceived outcomes of a task, therefore choosing not to engage with that particular task (Vancouver, More, & Yoder, 2008). Self-efficacy is seen as an essential component in academic agency, in which it affects the course of actions individuals undertake to attain levels of academic performance (Zimmerman, 1995). For example, learners with low self-efficacy beliefs tend to attribute their outcomes, both successes and failures, to factors beyond their control, such as luck or perceived task difficulty, and as such, are less motivated to attempt similar tasks again. Learners with high self-efficacy perceptions are more aware of the agency of their actions, and are more likely to attribute future outcomes to their own actions.

2.1.Sources of self-efficacy

According to Bandura (1997), there are four sources of influence that affect the development of self-efficacy beliefs. These include enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological states.

Enactive mastery experiences are best represented by previous performances in the specific domain. These perceived performances are the most influential of sources on self-efficacy belief formation (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Pre-existing self-knowledge constructs are formed when the individual cognitively categorises their previous experiences, creating biases that are called upon when determining future outcomes.

Vicarious experiences are facilitated through modelling and social comparison relative to the achievements of others. A social comparison with peers who are considered as similar in ability has a strong effect on self-efficacy. For example, when an individual outperforms a classmate regarded as similar in capabilities, this results in higher appraisals of self-efficacy for that individual. People often seek models who demonstrate qualities and capabilities that they admire (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). When an individual observes a model performing a task, this potentially raises self-efficacy through aspirational modelling of that expert.

Social persuasion includes the influence of feedback, often from those who are viewed as expert models in the specific domain. When an individual is endorsed by the expert, self-efficacy is raised through validation. Evaluative feedback at the early stages of development create a notable impact on personal self-efficacy (Schunk, 1984). Feedback framed as devaluative, for instance, undermines the individual's belief, whereas feedback that focuses on the achievement raises personal efficacy beliefs. While positive feedback can raise short-term self-efficacy, the effect is less likely to endure if it is followed by subsequent poor performances (Schunk, 2012).

Physiological indexes include emotionally triggered states such as anxiety or elation. According to Bandura (1997, p. 109), 'pre-existing efficacy beliefs create attentional, interpretive, and memory biases' in the central nervous system. This information is processed into percepts that become encoded events in the memory. The result is that individuals revert to perceived affective reactions rather than recalled ability when self-appraising task competency.

2.2. Self-efficacy and second language learning

Previous studies have shown positive correlations between self-efficacy beliefs and language performance (Hsieh & Kang, 2010; Mills, 2014). According to Moreno and Kilpatrick (2018), the higher the degree of second language usage, the higher the self-efficacy beliefs, and vice versa – high self-efficacy leads to an increased willingness to communicate (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2007). Graham (2006) has demonstrated how low self-efficacy language learners tend to make negative attributions to their academic outcomes, often claiming the language learning environment is uncontrollable and inaccessible. When it comes to L2 self-assessments, particularly of a language that may have been learned in school, and has not been activated since, the accuracy of these estimations is more than likely to be based on previously established perceptions of self-efficacy rather than actual ability (Bandura, 1997). Pajares (1996) identifies self-efficacy beliefs as having the potential to create a filter through which new experiences in an associated domain are interpreted and behaviour is modified accordingly. This filter concept is relevant in the Irish language context where for most adults, the language has not been used since leaving the school environment (CSO, 2017). It is the pervasiveness of past learning experiences, and its associated variables such as teaching methodology or the classroom environment, for example, that can lead to the underestimations of ability, even in recent school leavers when it comes to Irish language self-assessments (see Murtagh, 2003).

3. The Irish language context

The Irish language is designated as the official first language of Ireland. However, only 1.7% of the population of Ireland claim to speak the language on a daily basis (CSO, 2017). Every five years, the Irish Government undertakes a Census of Population to gather data for the State. The question 'can you speak Irish' is asked in the education section of the Census. If a person opts for 'yes', the follow-up question enquires about their frequency of usage. The 2016 data imply that 39.8% of the population over three years of age can speak Irish (CSO, 2017). In the Irish language speaking regions – the Gaeltacht – representing just 2% of the population, only 63% claim to be able to speak Irish (CSO, 2017). The Irish language is a compulsory subject in the national curriculum. The terminal exam - the Leaving Certificate, is undertaken at the age of 17 or 18 years (State Examinations Commission, 2019). A pass in Irish (40% or above) is required for entry into any National University of Ireland. It is estimated that by the time the average student completes their final exam in Ireland they have been exposed to over 2,000

Irish language classroom hours (Ó Laoire, 2005). Until 1975, a pass in Irish was required for employment in the civil service.

The *Official Languages Act 2003* aims to promote the use of the Irish language for official purposes through the improved provision of public services through the Irish language. Walsh (2012) identifies three primary requirements: a direct obligation covering correspondence with the public; obligations based on regulations made by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht related to visual branding and signage; and obligations based on the 3-year language schemes published by public bodies stating how they plan to address the provision of Irish language services in their own department. While the Public Appointments Service, the central recruitment agency for the State, creates panels of Irish speaking staff to fulfil recruitment needs as they arise, the training and recruitment of Irish speaking staff still remains the remit of each individual department. The majority of civil and public service bodies have established an Irish language office to ensure that the *Act* is being adhered to. As part of the *Official Languages Act 2003*, the role of An Coimisinéir Teanga is established to monitor the compliance by public bodies with the *Act*. The most recent monitoring report has revealed that only 2.62% of 21,060 staff in the Government departments surveyed can provide services through the Irish language (An Coimisinéir Teanga, 2019).

4. Methodology

The over-arching aim of this study is to employ qualitative methods to determine the influence of Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy on Irish language belief formation in civil servants complying with the requirements of the *Official Languages Act 2003*.

4.1. Participants

The following study was carried out with participants from a civil service department in which an Irish language office has been established. An open call to participate in this study was issued across a civil service department with an estimated 900 employees. The sample group comprised of an official Irish language officer, staff who are formally acknowledged as being proficient in responding to requests submitted under the *Act*, current Irish language learners, and those who self-declare as having no Irish language skills. The department determines its official Irish speaking staff figures by allowing staff to self-assess whether they can speak Irish or not. Two participants work through Irish on a daily basis, with a number of the other self-declared Irish speakers being able to respond to official queries in Irish.

In total, 15 participants across three 60 to 90 minute-long focus group discussions took part in this research. The decision to use focus groups instead of one-to-one interviews was based on the fact that focus groups provide access to differing social conditions (Usher, 2009). Furthermore, self-efficacy formation is grounded in social group interactions, and that when group members feel empowered, the raised collective efficacy and performance of the group can be observed (Bandura, 1997). The criterion for inclusion was that participants had completed the compulsory Irish language course to Leaving Certificate level. All participants except one can be described as 'new speakers' of Irish, i.e. speakers outside the education system who have not grown up in an Irish speaking environment (O'Rourke & Walsh, 2015). Only one participant formally studied Irish at third level, with all self-declared Irish speakers having taken courses or tuition since leaving school. Each participant was provided with an information sheet to fill out before beginning the discussion giving them the opportunity to declare their ability to speak Irish, and to what extent. The self-assessment categories were taken from the Committee of Irish Language Attitudes Research report (CILAR, 1975), and have been replicated in other studies since (see Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009; Darmody & Daly, 2015). These ability statements, and the responses, are listed in Table 1, below.

	I can understand the odd word	I can understand simple sentences	I can understand parts of conversation	I understand most conversations	I consider myself to have native speaker ability
FG 1	-	-	**5**	-	**2**
FG 2	-	**3**	-	**1**	-
FG 3	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	-

Table 1: Self-assessment of Irish speaking skills

Group 1 was comprised of all self-declared Irish speakers, including the department's Irish language officer, a participant that grew up in an Irish speaking environment, and staff that meet formally, on a weekly basis, to practice and use the language. Group 2 consisted of an Irish speaker that received their entire education from the age of 13 in the Irish language, and three self-professed non-Irish speakers. Group 3 was made up of two non- and two Irish speakers, one of which regularly answers queries submitted by the public through Irish. Table 2 represents the composition of each group.

		Age group			
		18-29	*30-39*	*40-49*	*50+*
Group 1 (m=1; f=6)	Irish speaker (n=7)	1	-	2	4
Group 2 (m=2; f=2)	Irish speaker (n=1)	-	1	-	-
	Non-Irish speaker (n=3)	-	1	2	-
Group 3 (f=4)	Irish speaker (n=2)	-	1	-	1
	Non-Irish speaker (n=2)	-	2	-	-

Table 2: Focus groups categorised by age, gender and Irish ability

The semi-structured discussion was based around a series of questions determined by previous attitudinal studies (see CILAR, 1975; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009; Hickey, 2009; Darmody & Daly, 2015) and a review of the literature on linguistic self-efficacy. All focus groups were conducted in the first language of the majority of participants – English. Examples of self-efficacy questions include: 'What was the quality of feedback in school like?'; 'How would you describe a fluent Irish speaker?'; and 'Did your family encourage you to learn the Irish language?'. The discussions were recorded and fully transcribed. Participants are coded with the following identifier: participant number/group number, represented as P2G1 for participant 2, focus group 1, for example. The transcripts were then coded to identify evidence of self-efficacy constructs. The following section presents the focus group discussions structured around each of Bandura's (1997) four sources of self-efficacy within the Irish language context.

5. Focus group self-efficacy belief sources

5.1. Enactive mastery experience

Enactive mastery experience is a source of self-efficacy based on the outcomes of personal experiences and previous performances on similar tasks (Williams & French, 2011). With all participants having studied the Irish language up to Leaving Certificate level, all involved have language experiences and performance perceptions that they can call upon when self-assessing abilities. The majority of the self-declared non-speakers have no recent experiences upon which to base their perceptions of abilities. Therefore, in the absence of performances, this source of self-efficacy is based solely on school experiences over 20 years in the past, resulting in presumptions of language loss:

> I didn't have experiences of being around people, so it's purely academic in that sense. Once I finished that exam it was gone. (P3G3)

Participants compared how Irish was taught with other languages, associating the teaching methods and materials of other languages with utility and practicality, reinforcing the perception among some that Irish has no value:

> I think as well, with Irish, you always have the feeling that you're learning it, but where will I actually use it? Whereas with French and German, it's taught very practically…. with Irish, you're learning it and there is no proper end result, you know. (P2G2)

Even among the non-speakers with access to speaking opportunities and previous successful performances, there is evidence that enduring low self-efficacy beliefs are preventing access to these current opportunities:

> P4G3: I worked in an Irish college over summers. Not every summer, but a couple of summers, and I would have done quite well in honours Leaving Cert Irish, and I lived with *Gaelgeoirs* (Irish speakers) in Connemara
> P1G3: you should be well able
> P4G3: no way [laugh] no way

The same low self-efficacy participant above spoke enthusiastically about using an application for their mobile phone – Duolingo, which allows users to undertake quick daily lessons and tests in a chosen language. Despite the initial positive experiences of this participant, the negative effects of their school experiences appear to dominate the self-assessment process.

Collective systems, such as classrooms and social groups, tend to develop a sense of shared beliefs in capabilities known as collective efficacy within which the sources of self-efficacy interact (Pajares, 1996). This was evidenced in the Irish speaking Group 1. Despite mainly choosing the more conservative *'I can understand parts of conversation'* as a general statement of ability on their respective information sheets (see Table 1), the participants demonstrated a high collective efficacy that appeared to raise individual efficacy beliefs over the course of the discussion; signalled by their increased use of Irish words and phrases. This is due in large part to the fact that six of the seven participants from Group 1 are members of the department's Irish language club – *Seomra Caidrimh* (common room) – named after the room where they meet on a weekly basis to speak and discuss topics through the Irish language.

Irish speakers in the mixed groups expressed an initial reluctance to declare a high level of self-efficacy. For example, a participant in Group 2 that had received the latter half of their education through Irish, and provides Irish language services for the department, expressed surprise at their abilities:

> I actually worked on that project, and for a while I used to take Irish queries and I actually performed better than I thought, and I had more than I thought I knew. (P3G2)

Motivation to speak the language is achieved with the ability to cognitively envisage positive future outcomes (Bandura, 1977). For most of the non-Irish speakers, previous unsatisfactory experiences have been used to attribute low self-efficacy beliefs, thus reducing motivational behaviours. When asked why they don't attempt the language, a participant who had a large degree of non-school based experience with the Irish language stated:

> There have been no social scenarios where I've needed to use it. There have been no business scenarios where I've needed to use it. If someone rings up looking to speak in Irish, there's someone in the office I can point them to and let them talk to them that way. (P4G3)

The ability to rely on Irish speakers to fulfil the *Act*'s requirements means that there is little incentive to avail of performance opportunities in the department.

While previous performances have been identified as the most robust source of efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997), a comment from a non-Irish speaking participant seemed to contradict this, and raise further questions on the reliability of Census Irish self-assessment data. When asked how they answer the Irish question on the Census, P1G2 revealed that despite having low self-efficacy in Irish speaking abilities, they answer 'yes', using the Census as a means to reinforce their national identity, rather than as an accurate appraisal of language skills:

> The only way I would say yes is to identify myself as having some kind of education in Irish and having learned it. I'd use it to identify myself as someone that has a past in Irish versus someone who is a non-national, and probably doesn't have it. (P1G2)

5.2. Vicarious experiences

Learners often acquire information about their own abilities through comparisons with similar others (Schunk, 1985). Vicarious experiences are represented by models exhibiting traits as diverse as expertise or coping abilities. The use of modelling appears to be an influential source of self-efficacy belief formation for both Irish speaking and non-speaking participants. One non-Irish speaking participant, whose immediate social circle consists mainly of Irish speakers spoke about how their friends' abilities instil a love of the language. However, the social comparison only results in establishing a high standard which cannot be reached according to the participant – 'I have a great love of the language but I'm just no good at it'. Another non-Irish speaking participant (P1G2) demonstrated how perceptions of model ability can prevent access to vicarious experiences by stating that they would be reluctant to join the *Seomra Caidrimh* - 'the conversations classes in here, I'd love to go to them. But I feel like they'd be so far ahead'.

Within the Irish speaking Group 1, there were different tiers of expert models, with those having grown up in Irish speaking households held in high regard by those that are relearning the language. The Irish language officer (P7G1) was indirectly regarded as the mastery model by the other participants in Group 1 throughout the discussion as the group reaction below demonstrates:

> *Were you satisfied with your Leaving Certificate results?*
> P1G1: I did honours Irish. Yeah, I was happy
> P6G1: I was happy
> P7G1: I was not
> P1G1: Why? You got an A minus instead of an A plus
> ALL: [Laughter]

One of the Irish speakers in Group 1 again mentioned the issue of perceptions of model inaccessibility. This participant spoke of their experiences of joining a choir of native Irish speakers in order to gain access to what they see as mastery models. While the experience was largely positive, the participant found the group switching to English when responding to them disheartening, reinforcing the boundaries between learner and model, thus lowering self-efficacy:

> I think the whole Irish speaking community is very… it's closeted away. (P4G1)

Even some of the Irish speakers agreed with this sentiment, but from the perspective that speaking the language can create an exclusionary environment:

> I'm kind of conscious that you're excluding people if you're speaking Irish in an environment that not everybody understands. (P2G1)

This statement represents the other side of this issue - the Irish speakers themselves are conscious about performing an indirect modelling role. This results in an unconscious withdrawal of the vicarious experience for learners.

An interesting dynamic was observed in Group 1 when asked for opinions on new speakers (i.e. new learners) of Irish:

> *What is your opinion of 'new speakers' of Irish?*
> P1G1: I admire them. Are you talking about adults or children?
> *Adults more so. People that have left school and decided to relearn the Irish language.*
> P5G1: fair play to them
> P3G1: yeah
> P2G1: yeah, great

The participants do not seem to regard themselves as being 'new speakers' of Irish, despite only one member having grown up in an Irish speaking household, and refer to other learners as 'them'.

5.3. Social persuasion

According to Schunk (1989, p. 196), 'feedback indicating skilful performance or progress in skill acquisition validates one's sense of efficacy and leads to further skill refinement'. In the absence of such feedback, learners have no effective means of monitoring progress. When participants were asked about the quality and form of feedback they received in school, the majority of responses were negative:

Did you get much feedback in school?

P1G1: No. You had to do it or you got a slap

P3G1: Yeah, it was like that

P2G1: Your exams were your feedback

In Group 2, the absence of feedback was raised and highlighted with a comparison drawn with other languages:

What was the quality of feedback in school like?

P2G2: No direction. I don't actually remember ever getting any feedback in Irish

P1G2: your summer exams – your result – that was your feedback

P2G2: Whereas, straight away with my German teacher, there was always the positive reinforcement straight away.

From these two extracts it is evident that feedback was not a continuous process, with learners relying on their end of year exams for performance indicators.

A supportive environment evolved during each of the focus groups, with non-speakers encouraged to reassess their level by the Irish speakers. In Group 3, one of the Irish speakers encouraged the two non-speakers to re-evaluate:

Just from this discussion, I would consider both of ye and say ye could both have a conversation if ye had to. (P1G3)

This evaluation may have been partially based on the evidence that one of the non-Irish speakers used a number of Irish phrases and words in the discussion. One of the participants in Group 3, who declared outright at the start that they had low self-efficacy beliefs, appeared to undergo a reassessment process when recalling previous events. For example, when discussing watching an Irish language documentary with an Irish speaking friend, one of the Irish speaking participants tried to reassure them of their abilities. However, despite this brief reassessment, self-efficacy returned to its initial lower level:

P4G3: So I was delighted because it was really simple Irish, so I could understand that – really simple, short sentences

> P2G3: They were hardly making up the sentences for you
>
> P4G3: I don't know. I don't think your man was fluent Irish

The Irish speakers in Group 1 who are members of the Irish language club, all made reference to the *Seomra Caidrimh,* the room that they meet in weekly to speak in Irish. This is regarded as a supportive, recognised space where speakers of varying ability meet to converse in the language. This initiative was created following a training intervention in 2010 where employees undertook an Irish language course in preparation for extended requirements of the *Official Languages Act 2003*. Following the positive experiences of the course, the employees decided to create their own immersion environment. The *Seomra Caidrimh* lasts only 30 minutes a week, and for most it represents the only source of social interaction in the Irish language. For the Irish speaking participants, this minimal exposure appears to have efficacy-raising effects, with short, regular performances aiding this process.

5.4. Physiological indexes

Both speakers and non-speakers discussed the anxiety they felt at the thought of having to use the language. Non-speakers who declared themselves as having finished school with satisfactory results made statements such as –

> If you asked me to translate something or have a conversation, I'd struggle. I have a few flashbacks still [laughs]. (P1G2)

However, it was the Irish speakers who expressed the most anxiety. One of the participants who regularly responds to queries under the *Official Languages Act 2003* declared "I'd always be fearful to say 'yeah, I'm completely fluent'" (P3G2). The same participant had gone to an Irish speaking school, and had grown up in an Irish speaking household. When asked the general question 'can you speak Irish?' they responded "I'd be nervous when asked that question – almost fearful that someone is going to start a conversation with you, and test you". This fear of having your level tested was a common theme among the Irish speakers. However, the reasoning behind this physiological state is not without foundation, as one of the groups discussed:

> P1G3: there are people who ring and check that services are being provided in Irish all the time. Just so ye know

> P4G3: it is something I am very aware of
>
> P1G3: they do spot checks on it

As Government bodies are required to provide services in Irish as required, and with the added monitoring role of An Coimisinéir Teanga, staff in this department appear anxious that the *Act* is adhered to correctly. This may explain the preference for referring even the most basic queries through official channels, even in instances where abilities to respond are more than adequate.

An interesting self-efficacy raising source emerged with one of the non-speakers who had been using the Duolingo application. The lessons on the application reminded the participant of when they first encountered certain Irish words in school:

> It reminded me an awful lot of school and learning the colours. I went down through all the lessons on it. I was delighted with myself, genuinely delighted! (P4G3)

The use of technology appears to create an easy achievement target for this participant, resulting in a short-term raising of self-efficacy.

6. Discussion

This study demonstrates how self-efficacy beliefs in Irish language skills are a more predictive indicator of performance than abilities within the department. Some Irish speakers display low self-efficacy beliefs, often with a subsequent withdrawal from providing Irish language services despite receiving their education in Irish, growing up in an Irish speaking household, or working regularly in the language. Similar to findings in Murtagh (2003; 2007) and Murtagh and van der Slik (2004), non-speaking participants in particular display evidence of perceived Irish language attrition usually following prolonged periods of non-use. However, as previous second language attrition investigations have shown, these perceptions of language loss are generally over-estimated, with evidence of residual second language knowledge unknowingly present (Weltens, 1989; de Bot, Martens, & Stoessel, 2004). A further study into testing current abilities and demonstrating to staff whether Irish language knowledge has remained despite periods of non-use may result in raising self-efficacy as well as performance within the department.

Recent studies on collective efficacy have shown how perceptions of individual control were elevated when the group was perceived as being highly efficacious, leading to raised individual self-efficacy levels (Jugert, Greenaway, Barth, Büchner, Eisentraut, & Fritsche, 2016). The influence of collective efficacy beliefs at the individual level underlines the facilitative role that social identity with the Irish language has on participants in the Irish speaking group, with group members going as far as to distinguish themselves from other new speakers of Irish. The use of social spaces – digital and physical – in promoting an identity with the language, have had a positive, efficacy-raising influence on staff. Among the non-speakers, there is an acknowledgement that the language is an important, essential aspect of both social and Irish identity. However, as discussed in Darmody and Daly (2015), this does not always translate into motivation to learn or use the language.

On a number of occasions, the status of being an Irish speaker created a responsibility and pressure that resulted in avoidance behaviours ("I can speak it, but I'd lose my life if I had write in Irish" (P3G1)). The long-term effects of these pressures are that capable speakers are underestimating their abilities, again resulting in deference to perceived expert model peers. Further research is required into how these gradations of self-efficacy are formed and subsequently altered in such a dynamic way.

The participants all highlighted the absence or ambiguity of social persuasion and feedback from teachers when initially learning the language. According to Zeldin and Pajares (2000), social persuasion is balanced more towards having the power to undermine efficacy beliefs, and is significant in academic settings where teachers establish evaluative standards that have the power to determine a student's mastery experience (Chan & Lam, 2010). The effect is that learners make their own self-evaluations at a period in which feedback is an essential part of the language learning process (Schunk, 1984). These often miscalibrated evaluations are carried into adulthood, resulting in capable speakers declaring: "I have a great love of the language but I'm just no good at it" (P4G3). However, there is potential to redress these perceptions, as evidenced by the effect of positive peer-group social persuasion interventions in the focus groups.

7. Conclusion

While this study is limited to a single Government department with a small number of participants, and a comparative study with other departments would be required to strengthen

the generalisability of findings, there is evidence that self-efficacy beliefs are dynamic within very short time-frames, and are context-dependent. Contrary to the thesis that mastery experience is the most influential source of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), this study finds that the Irish speakers' general negative experiences, and the positive experiences of some of the non-speakers have a weak influence on future beliefs. Vicarious experiences and social persuasion, derived from supportive spaces and feedback, or lack thereof, appear to contribute the most to long-term self-efficacy belief formations within the department. For non-speakers – even those with previous successful performances – the fact that they can defer to Irish speakers when adhering to the *Official Languages Act 2003*, means that the opportunity to cognitively reappraise beliefs is being overlooked, and thus predetermined low self-efficacy beliefs remain embedded. Even among the Irish speaking cohort there is an unconscious hierarchical acknowledgement that certain speakers are more apt than others, resulting in capable Irish speakers not only underestimating their abilities, but deferring to these official expert models, such as the Irish language officer, when Irish language queries arise.

Ultimately, the *Official Languages Act 2003* has created an obligation in which the Irish language is now an embedded policy driver in Government departments. The establishment of Irish language officers and the provision of training for staff can potentially create an indirect effect on encouraging staff to seek out opportunities to engage with the language. However, this study demonstrates that the official recognition of Irish speakers in the office has not led to a higher engagement from non-Irish speakers, and in some cases Irish speakers, in this particular department. There is a demarcation that is reinforced by official staff role profiles and job descriptions, making the deference to officially recognised speakers a regularised occurrence. Furthermore, the autonomy and variety of methods with which individual Government departments determine whether staff are declared as Irish speakers still relies primarily on self-assessment (Ó Coisdealbha, personal communication, 2019), which as evidenced in this study, only increases the influence of mis-calibrated self-efficacy beliefs. With only 2.62% of the 21,060 staff covered under the Monitoring Report recognised as having Irish language skills (An Coimisinéir Teanga, 2019), and with capable Irish speaking staff such as those identified in this study holding low self-efficacy beliefs – resulting in a potentially larger pool of unrecognised Irish speakers across Government – further research investigating self-efficacy beliefs in other departments is required in order to determine the extent of this phenomenon, as well as the potential for developing efficacy-raising training interventions.

References

An Coimisinéir Teanga. (2019). *Monitoring Report 2018*. Retrieved from
https://www.coimisineir.ie/Tuarascalacha-Faireachain?lang=EN. Accessed: 10
October 2019.

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change.
Psychological Review, 84(2), 191-215.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*.
New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Worth.

Bandura, A. (2012). On the Functional Properties of Perceived Self-Efficacy Revisited.
Journal of Management, 38(1), 9-44.

Bruning, R., Dempsey, M., Kauffman, D. F., McKim, C., & Zumbrunn, S. (2013). Examining
dimensions of self-efficacy for writing. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *105*(1),
25.

Chan, J. C. & Lam, S.-F. (2010). Effects of different evaluative feedback on students' self-
efficacy in learning. *Instructional Science*, *38*, 37-58.

Chularut, P., & DeBacker, T. K. (2004). The influence of concept mapping on achievement,
self-regulation, and self-efficacy in students of English as a second language.
Contemporary Educational Psychology, 29(3), 248-263.

CILAR. (1975). *Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research Report*. Dublin:
Government Publications.

CSO. (2017). *Census of Population 2016 – Profile 10 Education, Skills and the Irish
Language*. Retrieved from https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-
cp10esil/p10esil/ilg/. Accessed: 1 November 2019.

Darmody, M., & Daly, T. (2015). *Attitudes towards the Irish language on the island of
Ireland*. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute. Retrieved from
https://www.forasnagaeilge.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Attitudes-towards-Irish-
2015.pdf. Accessed: 5 July 2019.

de Bot, K., Martens, V., & Stoessel, S. (2004). Finding residual lexical knowledge: The
"Savings" approach to testing vocabulary. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, *8*(3),
373-382.

Graham, S. (2006). A Study of Students' Metacognitive Beliefs About Foreign Language
Study and Their Impact on Learning. *Foreign Language Annals, 39*(2), 296-309.

Hickey, R. (2009). Language use and attitudes in Ireland. A preliminary evaluation of survey results. In B. Ó Catháin (Ed.), *Sochtheangeolaíocht na Gaeilge: Léachtaí Cholm Cille 39* (pp. 62-89). Má Nuad: An Sagart.

Hsieh, P. P.-H., & Kang, H.-S. (2010). Attribution and Self-Efficacy and Their Interrelationship in the Korean EFL Context. *Language Learning, 60*(3), 606-627.

Jugert, P., Greenaway, K. H., Barth, M., Büchner, R., Eisentraut, S., & Fritsche, I. (2016). Collective efficacy increases pro-environmental intentions through increasing self-efficacy. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, *48*, 12-23.

Mac Gréil, M., & Rhatigan, F. (2009). *The Irish Language and the Irish People*. Retrieved from Maynooth: https://www.coimisineir.ie/userfiles/files/PDFFile%2C15645%2Cen/.pdf. Accessed: 4 June, 2019

Mills, N. (2014). Self-efficacy in second language acquisition. *Multiple perspectives on the self in SLA*, 6-22.

Mills, N., Pajares, F., & Herron, C. (2007). Self-efficacy of College Intermediate French Students: Relation to Achievement and Motivation. *Language Learning*, *57*(3), 417-442.

Moreno, R., & Kilpatrick, J. (2018). Student perceptions of self-efficacy in the foreign language classroom: A design-based research study. *EDeR. Educational Design Research, 2*(1).

Murtagh, L. (2003). *Retention and attrition of Irish as a second language*. University of Groningen.

Murtagh, L. (2007). Out-of-school Use of Irish, Motivation and Proficiency in Immersion and Subject-only Post-primary Programmes. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 10*(4), 428-453.

Murtagh, L., & van der Slik, F. (2004). Retention of Irish skills: A longitudinal study of a school-acquired second language. *International Journal of Bilingualism, 8*(3), 279-302.

Ó Laoire, M. (2005). Three languages in the schools in Ireland. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 171*, 95-113.

O'Rourke, B., & Walsh, J. (2015). New speakers of Irish: shifting boundaries across time and space. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 231*, 63-83.

Pajares, F. (1996). Self-Efficacy Beliefs in Academic Settings. *Review of Educational Research, 66*(4), 543-578.

Schunk, D. H. (1984). Sequential attributional feedback and children's achievement behaviors. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 76*(6), 1159-1169.

Schunk, D. H. (1985). Self-efficacy and classroom learning. *Psychology in the Schools, 22*(2), 208-223.

Schunk, D. H. (1989). Self-efficacy and achievement behaviors. *Educational Psychology Review, 1*(3), 173-208.

Schunk, D. H. (2012). Social cognitive theory. In K. R. Harris, S. Graham, & T. C. Urdan (Eds.), *APA educational psychology handbook, Vol. 1: Theories, constructs, and critical issues* (pp. 101-123). Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Schunk, D. H., & DiBenedetto, M. K. (2016). Self-efficacy theory in education. In K. R. Wentzel & D. B. Meile (Eds.), *Handbook of Motivation at School* (pp. 34-54). Oxfordshire: Routledge.

State Examinations Commission (2019). Description of Certificate Examinations. Retrieved from https://www.examinations.ie/?l=en&mc=ca&sc=sb. Accessed: 15 July, 2020

Usher, E. L. (2009). Sources of middle school students' self-efficacy in mathematics: A qualitative investigation. *American educational research journal, 46*(1), 275-314.

Vancouver, J. B., More, K. M., & Yoder, R. J. (2008). Self-efficacy and resource allocation: Support for a nonmonotonic, discontinuous model. Journal of Applied Psychology, *93*(1), 35-47.

Walsh, J. (2012). Language policy and language governance: A case-study of Irish language legislation. *Language Policy, 11*(4), 323-341.

Weltens, B. (1989). The Attrition of French as a Foreign Language. Dordrecht: Foris Publications.

Williams, S. L., & French, D. P. (2011). What are the most effective intervention techniques for changing physical activity self-efficacy and physical activity behaviour—and are they the same? *Health Education Research, 26*(2), 308-322.

Zeldin, A. L. & Pajeres, F. 2000. Against the odds: Self-efficacy beliefs of women in mathematical, scientific, and technological careers. American educational research journal, *37*, 215-246.

Zimmerman, B. J. (1995). Self-efficacy and educational development. In *Self-efficacy in changing societies.* (pp. 202-231). New York, NY, US: Cambridge University Press