



STUDENTS' WRITING SELF-EFFICACY AND WRITING APPREHENSION RELATING TO THEIR WRITING PERFORMANCE: REFLECTION ON ETHIOPIAN FIRST YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

*This study aims at examining factors affecting the development of ESL/EFL writing performance especially students' writing self-efficacy and writing apprehension. In order to achieve the objective, the sample composed of 336 first year students of Adama Science and Technology University (Ethiopia) participated in the study. The instruments used to collect the data were writing self-efficacy and writing apprehension questionnaire as well as composition writing test. Descriptive analysis, T-test, ANOVA and Correlation were employed to analyze the data. From the analysis of the results, different findings came out from this study. First, the writing performance of almost three-fourth of the students was very poor. Second, there was no significant effect observed due to sex difference on their writing performance but age variation has effect on writing performance: the older groups were low apprehensive, perceived to have high self-efficacy and relatively composed better and obtained good result than the younger students. Third, the students' perceived writing apprehension and writing self-efficacy responses had strong relationship to their writing performance. While the students' writing self-efficacy and their writing performance had a positive correlation $r = .49^{**}$; $p < .01$ their writing*

*apprehension and writing performance were inversely related $r = -.62^{**}$; $P < 0.1$ which means that apprehensive students wrote very poorly and received low score than those who were low apprehensive. The study concludes with few pedagogical implications and recommendations based on the findings of the present study.*

Key words: writing self-efficacy; writing apprehension, writing skills; writing performance, EFL/ESL

1. Introduction

Writing skill is one of the most essential assets that human being uses to communicate. Literacy skills become a necessity to live in this era and onward as Prestine (2008: 225) says, “In the age of globalization, writing and reading have become basic human skills”. This implies that writing skill is a vital and even a compulsory skill that all students must acquire well at every level and make meaningful use of it (Graham, 2008; Prestine, 2008). However, factors such as cognitive, affective, social or combinations of all these could challenge the development of students’ writing skills that require the mastery of a variety of linguistics, cognitive and sociocultural competencies in second language learning context (Teshome Tola and Sree, 2016). This is to underscore that it is important to investigate linguistic and affective factors that can intrude on the teaching and learning of this essential but difficult skill. This study tries to look into the relationship of students’ writing self-efficacy and writing apprehension to their writing performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Writing Self-efficacy

The construct of self-efficacy, which was introduced by Bandura, represents one core aspect of his social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1997). According to Bandura, self-efficacy is concerned with perceived capability and perceived efficacy is a judgment of capability to execute given types of performances. Self-efficacy is defined as “beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (Bandura, 1977:2). The levels of self-efficacy can enhance or impede motivation. For example, people with high self-efficacy choose to perform more challenging tasks (Bandura, 1995). In other words, according to Bandura (1986), persons with strong self-efficacy are more confident in their

capacity to execute a behavior. Self-efficacy is enhanced when students perceive they perform well. Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) have argued that self-efficacy is one of the key motivational constructs in promoting students' engagement with reading and writing. This study considered self-efficacy in the context of specific task, the writing skills in first year university students.

Writing self-efficacy has been identified as a great influence on writer's performance in which students with high self-efficacy likely had high performance on paragraph in comparison with those who had low self-efficacy (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Pajares and Johnson, 1994; Pajares and Valiante, 1999). The same finding has been repeated stating the overall writing self-efficacy predicts the overall writing performance (Hetthong and Teo, 2013). The present study aims at examining writing self-efficacy as it is believed to indicate the level of writing performance of students particularly when correlated with writing apprehension. This is done with the assumption that self-efficacy is a universal construct that applies to measure and indicate different language skills particularly the writing skills at this early level to university life.

2.2. Writing Apprehension

The development of writing skills either in first (L1), second (L2) or foreign (FL) language is affected by different factors one of which is writing apprehension (Lee, 2005, Shang, 2013).The term apprehension and anxiety with regard to specific communicative skill are synonymously applied in research. Marshal and Vernon (2009) indicate that the communication apprehension literature related to oral communication anxiety was subsequently extended to writing apprehension (WA). Writing apprehension has then called attention of particular interest in the field ESL/EFL over the last several decades and much has been written with regard (Daly and Miller, 1975; Faigley, Daly and Witte 1981; Hassan 2001; Cheng, 2004; Lee, 2005; Singh and Rajalingam 2012). In the process of learning of second language, second language writing apprehension is "a general avoidance of writing and of situations perceived by the individuals to potentially requires some amount of writing accompanied by the potential for evaluation of that writing" (Hassan, 2001: 4). Writing apprehension is, therefore, negative and anxious feelings which a writer undergoes while writing that disrupt some part of his/her writing process.

In describing different behaviors that highly apprehensive student manifested, Dally (1977) noted that highly apprehensive students write less skillfully, use less intense language, make

short statements with fewer words, and use fewer-ly words, fewer commas and less delimiting punctuation. Daly (1978) further noted that students with higher writing apprehension levels performed more poorly on various measures of writing competency than low writing apprehensive students on a multiple-choice objective test. Faigley, Daly, and Witte (1981) conducted a study about writing apprehension by administering writing apprehension test and essay writing on different genres. The results indicate that most students with high writing apprehension produce lower quality work. According to Wen-Shuenn (2006), students who are found highly apprehensive score lower on standardized tests of writing and write essays that receive lower evaluations. Hassan (2001) indicates that students with high levels of writing anxiety wrote shorter compositions and did less qualified writing than their low anxious counterparts. A similar finding has been reported by Singh and Rajaligam (2012) that highly apprehensive writers yielded low quality papers as their output, avoided writing assignment and even procrastinated compared to those students who with low apprehensive feelings. Added to these, Abdel Latif , (2007: 67) has indicated that lack of linguistic knowledge, low foreign language self-esteem, low self-efficacy, poor writing experience and teachers' focus more on theoretical concepts than practical aspects and overuse of criticism in yielding feedback. Thus, this study takes concern of these cognitive and affective aspects that are believed to influence the teaching and learning of writing.

3. Objective of the study

The main objective of this study is to examine factors inhibiting the development of ESL/ESL students writing performance especially the relationship of writing self-efficacy and apprehension to writing performance. Derived from this main objective, the specific objectives are to:-

- 3.1 determine the actual writing performance level of first year students.
- 3.2 look into whether students writing performance have any variation as a function of students' gender and age difference.
- 3.3 find out the level of writing apprehension among first year university students.
- 3.4 identify whether students' writing self-efficacy and writing apprehension have relationship to the students' actual writing performance.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Participants

Out of 2600 freshman students assigned to Adama Science and Technology University Using Krejcie & Morgan (1970) sample size 336 students (212 male and 124 female) participated in the research. The participants of this study ranged in ages from 18-27 years old, of which 94% were 23 years old and below that.

4.2 Instruments

4.2.1 Composition Writing

To elicit written data from the students, the respondents were asked to write a free composition on a given topic. A particular topic was chosen with the purpose of encouraging students to write more freely and help reduce the psychological fear that they presumably might have from writing in English. It was expected that every student in Ethiopia has similar idea regarding the selected topic.

4.2.2 Writing Apprehension Questionnaire

In order to achieve the objectives of this quantitative research, the writing apprehension testing instrument that was developed by Daly and Miller (1975) was applied. This instrument is a standard writing apprehension measure and has been widely used across time on various groups of respondents. The writing apprehension questionnaire consisted of 26 items with the five-point Likert scale which included the variables (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) Uncertain, (4) disagree, (5) strongly disagree. All negatively worded items were reverse scored, so that high scores represented high levels of writing apprehension.

4.2.3 Writing Self-Efficacy Test (WSET)

In this study, the instruments used to measure self-efficacy were adopted from different sources. Based on the self-efficacy construct proposed by Bandura (1977), the scale developed by Erkan and Saban, (2011) was adopted to assess the students' writing self-efficacy in English as a foreign language. Writing Self-Efficacy Scale (WSES) had 28 items. In this study, to help students respond easily the researcher used the equivalent but ordinary terms such as strongly

agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, and strongly disagree. The scale was administered to the subjects in order to determine their self-beliefs linked to writing in English.

4.3 Pilot Study

A pilot test was administered on sample of 64 participants similar to the participants of the main study. The pilot study was conducted to examine the validity and reliability of the instrument, determine the amount of time required to complete the questionnaire and ensure that the participants can easily fill in the questionnaire without difficulty. So, the participants were first oriented about the information they would render. They were informed to fill in three part of the questionnaire carefully. The whole process took from 1.20 to 1.45 minutes. All the participants responded well to the survey question. The results obtained from the participants were computed using SPSS version 20. Writing self-efficacy questionnaire had 28 items. Because of the results of item analysis (i.e., calculation of item-total correlations), out of total of 28 items, four items (items 4, 17, 22 and 26) that yielded item-total correlations below .40 were deleted. The remaining 24 items reliability of the test was calculated using Cronbach's alpha, which was .90. The Chronbach alpha coefficient of the writing apprehension questionnaire was found to be 0.89 and all the items were acceptable based on the corrected item-total correlation and alpha if item deleted criteria. It implies that the questionnaire for writing self-efficacy and writing apprehension is highly reliable. Participants' essays were scored for completeness and quality by two trained raters. Chronbach Alpha Coefficient was computed for the interrater's reliability and found to be 0.94. It indicates that the interrater's reliability was very high. After the pilot study, the main study was conducted with 336 freshman students. Data collection and validation procedure followed the same way as indicated in the pilot study.

4.4 Results

4.4.1 Results of Writing Performance (WP)

One of the objectives of the study was to ascertain the writing performance level of the research participants. The results of all participants' writing performance which were evaluated by two raters and the calculated average result for each participant revealed that most of the students' writing ability was very low. As can be noticed from Table 1, 75.3 % of the students (N= 253) scored mean 29.2. This is far below the pass mark (the pass mark in this case is 35.5). In other words, out of 336 students, only 83 students (24.7%) scored above the pass mark said to be

competent writers. The result shows that participants had almost the same level of composing ability: their writing performance was very poor.

Table 1: Description of Students Composition Test Result

Writing Performance by Range				Writing Performance by Band			
Range	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Band	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
0 - 7	8	2.4	2.4	1	89	26.5	26.5
7.5 - 14	40	11.9	14.3				
14.5 - 21	50	14.9	29.2	2	81	24.1	50.6
21.5 - 28	71	21.1	50.3				
28.5 - 35	84	25	75.3	3	93	27.7	78.3
35.5 - 42	38	11.3	86.6				
42.5 - 49	22	6.5	93.2	4	50	14.9	93.2
49.5 - 56	12	3.6	96.7				
56.5 - 63	7	2.1	98.8	5	15	4.5	97.6
63.5 - 70	4	1.2	100				
Total	336	100		Total	336	100	

4.4.1.1 The Mean difference between Gender and WP

Table 2: Mean difference between Gender and WP

	Gender	N	M	SD	t	df	sig
Writing performance	Male	212	29.55	12.282	0.697	334	0.486
	Female	124	28.5	14.865			

In order to examine the difference in the writing performance of students due to gender variation an independent t-test was computed. The mean difference shown in Table 2, in the t-test, the Sig. (2-tailed) value is 0.486. As this value is above the required cut-off of .05, the result of the t-test indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean of writing performance score for male and female students.

4.4.1.2 Mean difference between Age and WP

The second objective was to look into whether students writing performance have any variation as a function of students' age difference. Therefore the applied one way ANOVA analysis indicated in Table 3 indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in writing performance levels across the different age groups (Sig=.000). For example, an inspection of the writing performance mean ranks for the age groups suggests that the older group (24-26) had the

highest writing performance scores whereas the younger group reporting to have the lowest score. This result shows younger students' writing performance is most likely weaker than the elder ones.

Table 3: Mean difference between Age and WP

	Age Variables	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig
Writing Performance	18-20	236	25.63	11.935	35.783	.000
	21-23	80	36.33	12.467		
	24-26	20	42.20	12.319		
	Total	336	29.16	13.281		

4.4.2. Results of Writing Apprehension

To statistically identify the intensity of apprehensiveness, the students were grouped into three apprehension levels depending on their response to WAT. They were, therefore, classified as high, moderate, or low in writing apprehension. Due to scoring method, a high score always indicated high apprehension and a low score represented that student had low writing apprehension. Z score value was applied to categorize these scores into the specified three levels yielding the cutoff point. Therefore, individuals scoring one standard deviation above the group apprehension score were statistically defined as high and those individuals who scored one standard deviation below the group apprehension mean score (M= 82.16, SD=20.36) were labeled as low in apprehension. In this way the remaining respondents whose scores fell within one standard deviation of the mean, SD range from +1 to -1, were classified as moderate in apprehension. In this way, as shown in Table 4, students' score greater than or equal to 90 which is 44.3% (N=149) indicates high apprehension, scores less than or equal to 61 which is 20.5% (N=69) shows low apprehension, and students with score found between these two limits are considered to be in a moderate apprehension which is 35.1 % (N=118).

Table 4: Level of Writing Apprehension

Level of Apprehension	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low Apprehension	69	20.5	20.5	20.5
Moderate Apprehension	118	35.1	35.1	55.7
High apprehension	149	44.3	44.3	100
Total	336	100	100	

4.4.3 Results of Writing Self-Efficacy Test (WSET)

Table 5: Writing Self efficacy

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Writing Self-efficacy Test	336	34	113	73.46	15.302

The statistical analyses presented in Table 5 show the results of the mean (73.46 or 3.06) and standard deviation (15.3 or 0.64) of students' response on their perceived writing self-efficacy. As it is indicated, the lowest mean for writing self-efficacy was 34 and to the extreme, the highest mean was 113 (or 4.71). The lowest mean indicates the student has no confidence and his/her efficacy in writing was so low whereas highest mean indicates the reverse, which means that the student has very good confidence towards writing. Maximum number of students reported to have moderate writing self-efficacy.

4.4.4 Analysis of the WAT and WSET relationship to WP

In order to examine the relationship of these three main variables, i.e. the aggregate writing apprehension test result (WAT) and the overall writing self-efficacy Test (WSET) belief result, to the independent variable, students' writing performance (WP), and Pearson's correlation was applied. As it can be seen from Table 6, the students' perceived writing apprehension and writing self-efficacy responses had strong relationship to their writing performance. The results show that writing apprehension has very strong inverse relationship to writing performance, $r = -.62^{**}$; $p < 0.01$. This implies that highly apprehensive students were most likely to receive low writing performance result or their writing achievement was very poor. It is possible to state that the more students experienced high writing apprehension, the poorer their writing performance would be. Unlike the high apprehensive students, low apprehensive students performed better than high apprehensive students and consequently could receive better result on writing skills.

Table 6 Summary of the Relationship among Variables

		Writing Performance	Writing Apprehension	Writing Self Efficacy
Writing Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	-.618**	.498**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0	0
	N	336	336	336
Writing Apprehension	Pearson Correlation	-.618**	1	-.454**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0		0
	N	336	336	336
Writing Self Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.498**	-.454**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	
	N	336	336	336

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

With regard to the relationship between writing self efficacy and writing performance the result shows that there is strong a positive correlation between writing self-efficacy and writing performance, $r = .49^{**}$; $p < .01$. The result demonstrates that the higher the writing self-efficacy of students the better their writing performance would be. To the reverse, students who perceived to have lower self-efficacy might lack confidence and most probably performed so poorly. It can be observed that students writing apprehension and writing self-efficacy had strong relationship to their writing performance. Each has a predictive power on writing performance but in an inverse direction. The output generated in Table 6 indicates the relationship between the writing apprehension and the writing self-efficacy reveals that the WAT had a strong inverse relation with WSET, $r = -.45^{**}$. From this result it can be inferred that highly apprehensive students would have low writing self-efficacy but low apprehensive ones can have high self-efficacy. In other words highly apprehensive students write more poorly than their counter part. Similarly, students with high self-efficacy could perform better and achieve high result than the low efficacious and highly apprehensive ones.

6. Discussion

The main objective of this study is to examine factors inhibiting the development of ESL/ESL students writing performance especial focus on the relationship of writing self-efficacy and apprehension to writing performance. Different findings came out from this study. First, the writing performance of majority of the students was very poor. Students exhibited poor writing due to different reasons. Students may not acquire pertinent writing knowledge, skill and strategy (Benton, Corkill, Sharp, Downey & Khramtsova, 1995; Yancey, 2009), correspond to lower literacy level (Shang 2013), experience low writing self-efficacy (Williams & Burdens, 1997) and/or experience high writing apprehension (Daley & Miller, 1975; Lee, 2002, Singh and Rajalingam 2012). Graham and Perin (2007) indicates poor writers may not acquire pertinent writing strategies and composing techniques, which means that students have not yet acquired basic composing skills and knowledge. Added to these, other factors such as attitude, motivation, gender, age, academic preparedness, etc., though results are controversial; have been reported to have influence on students' academic achievement. In this study, students' gender and age were compared to the results of writing performance. The result show that there was no significant effect observed due to sex difference on their writing performance but age variation has effect on writing performance: the older groups were low apprehensive, perceived to have high self-efficacy and relatively composed better and obtained good result than the younger students.

The first main component of this research refers to the discussion of the results of the students' writing self-efficacy relation to their writing performance. From the review of correlational studies of students' self-efficacy in L2/FL settings within the last 10 years, the evidences have supported the claim that language achievement or performance can be explained by self-efficacy beliefs (Huwari and Aziz, 2010; Salem and Foo, 2012; Erkan & Saban, 2011; Hetthong and Teo, 2012; Shang, 2013). The objective in line with this component was therefore to postulate whether an investigation with Ethiopian EFL students would yield the same result or not. In this study, the result of students' confidence level to successfully write composition in English (their writing self-efficacy) indicated that most of the students had a moderate writing self-efficacy. The students' writing self efficacy and their writing performance had a positive correlation $r = .49^{**}$; $p < .01$. The results demonstrate that the higher the writing self-efficacy of students, the better their writing performance would be and could receive a better writing score. These findings are also in line with other researchers works. For example, it supports the findings of

Bandura (1986) and Pajares (1996) who found that people with high efficacy are more successful than people who have low self-efficacy. Hetthong and Teo (2012) and Sarkhoush (2013) have reported that there was significant positive relationship between writing self-efficacy and writing performance of their research participants. Multon, Brown & Lent (1991) revealed that self-efficacy determines 14% of the variance of students' academic performance.

In this study, majority of the students were very apprehensive and the result shows that the writing apprehension and the writing performance were inversely related which means that apprehensive students wrote very poorly than those who were low apprehensive. Different research findings consistently report that writing apprehensions and writing performance have small to strong negative correlations. For example, this study result was in line with the result of Asmari (2013) who reported that his research participants' writing anxiety level was inversely correlated to their writing performance $r = -42^{**}$, $P < .01$. The result was also consistent with many previous studies which have argued that writing apprehension is negatively associated with writing achievement (e.g. Daley & Miller, 1975; Faigley, Daly, & Witte, 1981; Horwitz et al., 1986; Hassan, 2001; Cheng, 2004; Atay & Kurt, 2006; Sarkhoush, 2013).

Writing self-efficacy and writing apprehension are confirmed to be trustworthy variables help to explain students' language performance. The result of the analysis between the two variables indicates that writing self-efficacy had strong negative correlation with writing apprehension. This finding can be explained on the ground that students whose perceived writing self-efficacy was high, were low apprehensive and therefore they performed poorly and also obtained poor result. In this circumstance, as noted by MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) writing apprehension and writing self-efficacy can have a reciprocal relation. Similarly, Singh and Rajalingam (2012) reported the relation between WAT and WSET was $r = -.54^{**}$ $P < .01$. Sarkhoush's (2013) research finding suggests that self-efficacy in writing and writing apprehension was negatively correlated, the same research reports that self-efficacy in writing and writing performance had a significant positive relationship. Mabekoje (2010) states that students with high self-efficacy have confidence in their abilities to organize and execute actions and can solve academic challenges.

5.6. Implication and Recommendation

Since writing apprehension and writing performance are reciprocal, apprehensive students could not have most probably confidence in their writing. Therefore, since the existence of apprehension reflects lack of confidence or low language skills, students should be given sense of confidence, encouraged to do cooperative writing, enabled to apply strategy that reduce writing apprehension (see Hassan 2001). Furthermore, it should be the primary concern of teachers to make writing classroom attractive and give autonomy for the students. As the age has significant effect on the students' writing performance, teachers need to mix students with different gender, age and some performance level while grouping and letting them do cooperative writing. It is important to initiate students towards peer feedback, teaching students the tools they need to be successful, and emphasizing evaluation of personal progress. Disliking the writing course is lack of ownership so that teachers should increase students' feelings of ownership of the importance of writing and writing strategies. If students writing self-efficacy fail, it is difficult to raise it up, a serious precaution is needed. Bandura (1997) suggested that damaged efficacy beliefs are almost impossible to remedy, if self-efficacy is a predictor of student competence, then teachers should pay attention to students' perceptions of their personal competence.

Once students become apprehensive and influenced by negative attitude, without an effective instructional intervention, student would continue to be even more apprehensive, find writing as frustrating (Santagelo et al, p: 81). One way to advance students' writing achievement in secondary school level, where the findings indicated the interest of writing declines, is to give independent writing course that widely developed around self regulated strategy development (Harris et al, 2006, 2008). The course materials to be used should accommodate the needs of the learners. When trying to tackle students' reluctance to writing and raise their writing interest and motivation, teachers need to use research-validated practices added to their intuitive skills and techniques of teaching.

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