Self-efficacy and Writing Performance of Preparatory School Students in North Shoa Zone

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Abstract: The main objective of this study was to investigate gender, self-efficacy, and performance in writing. To achieve this objective, data were collected using questionnaire and writing test. The subjects for the study were selected from North Shoa Zone Preparatory School students. Two hundred fifty-five students who were selected randomly filled in the questionnaire and wrote the compositions correctly. The data were analyzed using percentage, mean, standard deviation, independent t-test, one way ANOVA, post hoc comparison, and Pearson’s Moment Correlation Analysis techniques. The findings showed that students’ writing self-efficacy was average; however, most students’ performance of writing was found to be below average. In addition, boys and girls did not show a significant difference in their self-efficacy score of writing although these same groups indicated a significant variation in their performance of writing. The study further indicated that the students’ writing-self-efficacy was significantly correlated to their writing performance. Finally, students at different schools also showed different levels of abilities and self-efficacy beliefs of EFL writing. The study concluded that: (1) the writing performance of students in general and female students in particular was not up to the standard; (2) gender difference was not observed in the students’ self-efficacy belief of writing although it was apparently seen in their performance of writing; (3) students’ self-efficacy belief of EFL writing was a strong predictor of their performance of EFL writing. Accordingly, it is recommended that preparatory schools should design programs in which students make adequate writing practices, and English language teachers should also work at enhancing students’ self-efficacy belief of writing if they are to improve their writing capability.

Key words: gender, writing self-efficacy, performance of writing

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Background of the study

The influence of psychology on learning English language in general and EFL writing in particular is well evident. For example, Stern (1983) explained that any language teacher and language learner can testify that language learning often calls for a strong positive or negative attitude. Because of this, as Williams and Burden (1997) noted, most theories and approaches of English language teaching are derived from psychology; for example, behaviorism, cognitivism, and the humanistic approach are psychological theories from which many language teaching methods are derived. In fact, the silent way, community language teaching and suggestopedia are the language teaching methods which are based on the humanistic perspectives, and the audio-lingual method is informed by the behaviorist view, and the student-centered language teaching methods take the basic tenets from cognitive theory, specifically, constructivism.

In brief, according to Williams and Burden (1997), constructivism, which grows mainly out of Piaget’s and Kelly’s works, argued that students construct meaning from their own experiences. Also, the humanistic approach, which goes in line with constructivism, argued that every student can have his/her own will—and can choose his/her own action; indeed, it focuses on the beliefs students hold and puts learners first and the writing lesson second.

Moreover, Wenden (1991) noted that the cognitive approach can focus on the effort learners put to attend EFL lessons; it argues that students will learn better when they actively think about what they are learning; however, the cognitive theory takes for granted the humanistic theory which suggests that learners need to have the motivation first if they are required to attend the given lessons actively (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). That is, it is crucial to bring about the students’ motivation first so that they can invest their efforts and time on their learning of EFL writing lessons and show persistence during accomplishing challenging writing tasks.
Particularly, Bandura’s social cognitive theory, according to Pritchard and Woollard (2010), which goes in line with the constructivist thinking, views learners as proactive and self-regulating rather than reactive and controlled by biological and environmental factors; it views them as individuals who possess self-beliefs which enable them to control over their thoughts, feelings and actions (Pajares, 2003). Bandura (1986) explained that the beliefs which students possess regarding their capabilities to do specific tasks determine their behaviour and motivation; in fact, how people behave can be predicted by the beliefs they hold about their capabilities, that is, their self-efficacy beliefs. In other words, self-efficacy means the confidence a student can possess regarding his or her capability to do a specific task. For example, Dornyei (2001) defined self-efficacy as people’s judgement of their abilities to accomplish particular activities, and it influences their choice of activities, the amount of effort they use to do the activities and the persistence they show during accomplishing the tasks.

In other words, according to Ehrman (1996), high self-efficacy increases motivation for learning and enhances students’ academic achievement; that is, being a cognitive and motivational factor, it helps students to set challenging goals for themselves and achieve these goals. Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) noted that the belief one has about his/her capability to carry out a particular activity motivates him/her to set a goal, and that goal helps to regulate his/her effort.

Specifically, the confidences learners have about their capabilities of writing can predict their performances of writing. For example, Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) explained that students who have high self-efficacy belief of writing may use more thoughtful and skillful analytic strategies to improve their writing performance compared to those who do not have the confidence to write.

A student can form his /her self-efficacy belief by interpreting his/her own result of performance; that is, by experiencing an event actually, he/she can enhance his/her self-efficacy belief (Pajares, 2003). Also,
as Bandura (1994) notes, positive feedback (verbal persuasion) can boost a student’s self-efficacy belief; a student who receives positive feedback for doing a certain task can make greater efforts to do more than a learner who gets a negative feedback on the same task. On top of that, psychological states, for example, anxiety and/or stress can lower self-efficacy belief and ensure inadequate performance. This implies that teachers who teach EFL writing can promote students’ self-efficacy belief by providing them with opportunities to practice writing, giving positive feedback and avoiding negative feedback on their pieces of writings, using cooperative writing strategies, supporting students by making them write in class and using structured writing activities while students are learning writing or doing writing tasks, etc.

Another issue in relation to self-efficacy is gender which is a socially constructed notion of being male and female (Baker, 2001; O’sullivan, Graber and Brooks-Gunn, 2001). That is, according to Baker (2001), social constructivists argued that gender-segregated activities lead to gender differences in behaviour, and these differences can reflect the essential nature of male and female behaviours.

But, for Leveann (2001), gender is not only a socially defined experience but also a construct of biological and psychological entities, and it can be analyzed through a sociocultural lens as the convictions that people hold regarding being male and female are rooted in the social entity; these belief systems can affect the schooling conditions of the two groups (male and female) in a given society, and as such, gender discrepancy in favour of male students leads to the unfair treatment of female students in a given educational system. Particularly, learning writing and accomplishing writing activities on the part of students require motivation, and to promote it, determining the gender differences that might appear in students’ self-efficacy belief and performance of writing and act accordingly might have a pivotal function.
In line with this, several researchers described that girls report higher self-efficacy beliefs in writing than boys do (Pajares, Miller and Johnson, 1999; Pajares and Valiante, 2001 and Pajares, 2003). According to Pajares and Valiante (2001), these gender differences are rooted to task orientation; that is, writing is assumed to be a female area, and higher female self-efficacy is connected to the stereotypical view. In other words, in writing self-efficacy, gender differences are resulted from the view that girls are good at language, in general and writing skill, in particular in comparison to boys.

But, there is another point of argument which says that the gender differences which are apparently observed at early ages decrease when students get older (Johnson, 2003). For example, Pajares and Johnson (1996) reported that at grade 9, boys hold stronger writing self-efficacy beliefs than girls do. According to Pajares (2003) and (Cleary, 1996), the girls’ motivation to attend writing lessons declines when they join high school because they might come across classroom situations that favour boys.

Also, it is argued that a gender difference in writing self-efficacy is linked to previous success with writing. For example, in some studies, differences favouring girls were observed to be non-significant when previous achievement was controlled (Pajares and Valiant, 2001; Pajares, Miller, and Johnson, 1999) even though it seems incompatible to conclude in such a way.

Also in academic contexts, although self-efficacy scores reported by boys and girls showed gender differences in self-efficacy, some researchers believed that boys overestimated their self-efficacy belief of writing whereas girls tended to underrate their capability of composing (Wigfield, Eccles, and Pintrich, 1996). In other words, according to Noddigns (1996), boys and girls may use different grounds when they judge their confidence, and the actual gender difference in self-efficacy of writing might not be discovered.
Lastly, self-efficacy is context dependent which can go in line with Kumaravadivelu’s (2003) conception. Language pedagogy, to be relevant, must be sensitive to the local educational, institutional, and social contexts in which second language teaching-learning processes are taking place. Obviously, what suits in one context is not appropriate for another context, and language teaching should consider different contexts (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

**Statement of the Problem**

Different research findings consistently indicate that learners’ self-efficacy beliefs of writing predict their performance of writing. For example, McCarthy, Meir and Rinderer (1985), and Pajares and Johnson (1994), evidenced that their findings support Bandura’s Social cognitive theory which claims that self-efficacy belief predicts performance in a specific task; their research findings revealed that students with high confidence of writing write better than their counterparts with low self-efficacy belief of writing do.

Unlike the findings on the relationship between self-efficacy and performance of writing, research results on gender differences in (writing) self-efficacy and (writing) performance have shown inconsistency. While some findings revealed that there was no gender difference in the students’ writing self-efficacy beliefs although a significant gender difference was observed in their writing performances, others showed the opposite result to it.

For example, Pajares, Miller, and Johnson (1999) examined the nature of gender differences in the writing self-efficacy of elementary school students, and their finding indicated that there was no gender difference in the writing self-efficacy of students, but the female students writing performance was higher than their male counterparts writing exam scores. Furthermore, Williams and Takaku (2011) investigated gender, writing self-efficacy and help seeking among undergraduate students. The finding showed no gender difference in
the students' self-efficacy belief of writing; however, it showed a significant gender difference in their writing performance.

On the contrary, Shkullaku's (2013) finding indicated a different result. That is, she investigated gender differences in students' self-efficacy and academic performance including 180 students (102 females and 78 males) as subjects of the study. Questionnaire was employed to gather data about their self-efficacy, and their first semester grade point average GPAs were used to measure their writing performances. Her finding indicated that there was a significant difference between males and females in self-efficacy scores, but there was no significant difference between male students and female students in their academic performances.

Moreover, there is empirical evidence that comes up with a different argument and which claims that there are no significant gender differences between male students and female students in both writing self-efficacy scores and writing performance marks. For example, Hashemnejad, Zogi and Amini (2014) investigated the relationship between the students' self-efficacy and their writing performance across genders. One hundred twenty TEFL students were chosen as participants of the study. A writing test and a questionnaire on self-efficacy were used as data gathering tools. The data were analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment correlations and independent samples t-test. The finding revealed that there were no statically significant differences in both writing self-efficacy and performance of writing scores between male EFL students and female students.

Furthermore, Anteneh (2005) explored if there were gender differences in writing self-efficacy and writing performance among Adama University 2004/2005 entry students. A self-efficacy questionnaire and a test were used to gather data. The finding showed that there was a significant gender difference in the students' writing self-efficacy which contradicts the findings of Pajares, Miller and Johnson (1999) and Williams and Takaku (2011). Similarly, the same finding indicated that
there was gender difference in writing performance between boys and girls which is inconsistent with the finding of Shkullaku (2013). Furthermore, according to Anteneh’s finding, male students scored higher than their female age group in writing self-efficacy (which is contrary to Pajares, Miller and Johnson’s research findings), and boys scored higher than girls in their writing examinations. Obviously, Anteneh’s research findings appeared to be different from the other aforementioned research findings on gender differences in writing self-efficacy and performance of writing.

So far, an attempt is made to indicate controversies on gender differences in writing self-efficacy and performance of writing. The research findings do not seem to be conclusive and consistent enough to support one point of argument. In other words, it is difficult to take the individual findings for granted, for they show inconsistent results. Also, the aforementioned studies (both the international and the local researches) have not attempted to compare the different components of writing. On top of that, in these studies, comparisons have not been made in the students’ self-efficacy and performance scores of writing among the different schools although according to Broaddus (2012), environmental contexts often affect self-efficacy of students.

Considering the aforementioned gaps, the present researcher aimed at examining gender, writing self-efficacy, and performance of writing and their relationships as well in the context of preparatory schools. In an attempt to achieve this objective, the present researcher posed the following basic research questions:

- What is the students’ self-efficacy belief of writing?
- Does self-efficacy of writing vary across gender and schools?
- What is the students’ performance of EFL writing?
- Does performance of EFL writing vary across gender and schools?
- How do students’ self-efficacy and performance of writing relate to each other?
Significance of the study

The research could help EFL teachers to identify level of students’ confidence and competence to write and, then, to give special support for those who show low performance and confidence of writing. It would also help schools to identify the group (boys or girls) which shows lower self-efficacy belief and performance of writing and, accordingly, give remedial classes to it. In fact, it would help to ensure equity in gender, in particular, and quality in the process of teaching and learning of EFL writing lessons, in general.

Scope of the study

The research setting is North Shoa Zone in Amhara Regional State. The delimitation of the research topic to North Shoa Zone helped the researcher to look into the study with more rigor and focus, for he had been working at Debre Berhan University, found in North Shoa Zone, while he was conducting this study; and collecting data in the same Zone made things easier for him to make follow ups of the research subjects. Also, the study was restricted to preparatory school students, for it is the level where students need much exposure to a variety of writing activities; this will help develop students’ writing confidence and competence so that they could pursue their university academic study successfully. In short, it is the level where students get preparation to join university where they accomplish several tasks.

Research Methodology

Subjects of the study

Participants for the study were selected from North Shoa Zone Preparatory school, specifically from Grade 11 students. There are about 20 preparatory schools in the Zone, and out of these schools, five (25%) schools are chosen for the study. Specifically, six sections
(or 274 students of the six sections) filled in copies of the questionnaire and sat for the writing exam.

**Sampling techniques**

The researcher employed cluster and stratified sampling techniques to select participant students at different phases. That is, first he randomly selected five schools out of 18 preparatory schools excluding two schools which were far from his working place; he excluded these schools for it was difficult for him to make follow ups on students in the schools and to get valid and reliable data. Next, he chose six sections from the five selected schools. At this stage, he employed stratified sampling technique to select sample sections; that is, he chose two sections from one sample school, namely Hailemariam Mamo Preparatory School since it had several sections (about 20). But from the remaining four schools, he selected only one school from each as each of them had not more than three or four sections.

That is to say, the researcher used stratified sampling technique because, according to Kumar (1996), selecting subjects in proportion to their occurrence in the target population would help increase the validity of the data gathered. That is, he employed stratified sampling technique to select sections because students in urban and rural areas might not get equal opportunity in terms of educational facilities and qualified teachers. For example, Hailemariam Mamo Preparatory is different from the other schools in that it is found in the town used as a center for North Shoa Administrative Zone, and students in this school could be more advantageous in getting better facilities and experienced teachers than other schools found in woredas (districts); in the former, according the researcher’s observation, there were MA holders in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and teachers who had been teaching English for a long period of time. But in schools which were found in some woredas, diploma holders and less experienced teachers were assigned to teach English at Grade 11 level. In addition, the present researcher selected a section(s) from
each selected school considering each of them as a sub-population instead of listing all sections of the five schools as a whole and selecting the required number of sections from them.

Another important issue is that the researcher selected six sections from five schools; that is, he did not choose students directly from the schools. The reason for this is that selecting participants randomly from the whole population might be difficult for the researcher because the selected students might not volunteer to take the writing exam and fill in the copies of the questionnaire. In other words, he believed that selecting sample sections (instead of students) would help him to use subject teachers to administer the self-efficacy questionnaire and the examination to the sections they were assigned to teach. In fact, the researcher could collect valid data by getting the necessary supports from English language teachers in different schools.

Accordingly, two sections from Hailemariam Mammo Preparatory school, and one section from each of the remaining four selected schools were chosen, and a total of six sections were selected. That is to say, five sections (274 students of the six sections) were selected as the subjects of the study.

**Data collection instruments**

Questionnaire and writing examination were employed to collect data for the study.

**Questionnaire**

A writing self-efficacy questionnaire, which was adapted from Pajares, Johnson, and Miller (1999:61) self-efficacy scale, was employed to gather data for this study. Pajares, Johnson, and Miller used the questionnaire to measure gender differences on writing self-efficacy of elementary school students. In addition, by modifying some items of
the questionnaire and adding some more items to the same questionnaire, Ebabu (2012) used it to collect data for his study after conducting pilot test on it. In the pilot study, for example, its internal consistency or reliability was calculated employing Cronbach’s Alpha, and its value was found to be 0.92. Besides, the researcher tried to rephrase and rewrite the items of the questionnaire so that the questionnaire would help meet the objective of this study. The colleagues of the researcher read and offered comments on the modified version of the questionnaire, and the researcher attempted to incorporate their suggestions. Finally, he distributed the copies of the questionnaire to 15 Grade 11 students before he used it for the main study. As a result, he attempted to check if there were items which were vague and not helpful to meet the objective of the present study. Thus, he rephrased certain items based on the finding of the pilot study.

Writing test

A writing examination was administered in order to gather data about students’ ability to write compositions in English. The writing test/topic for the sampled students was chosen from the list of topics used for the IELTS tests. The topic was selected considering the students’ familiarity of the topic, and taking what students had learned in their Grade 11 English textbook into account.

First, five topics were adapted from the topics used in IELTS writing tests. Next, these topics were distributed to eight English language teachers who were teaching English at preparatory school level. Then, the teachers were told to rate the appropriateness of the topics for the intended objective. And they attempted to use certain criteria such as the topic’s difficulty level, the students’ familiarity to the topic, its relevance to students’ age and grade level, and its similarity to the writing tasks incorporated in Grade 11 English textbook. These could help teachers to rate the appropriate topic in which students did not face shortage of ideas while they were writing their compositions on it.
Then, one topic which was rated high by the teachers was taken as a topic for the writing test. The topic selected was again modified taking into consideration what students had learnt in their content area courses as well as in the English Language subjects from Grade 9-Grade 11. After deciding the topic to be used for the writing examination, an attempt was made to contextualize the writing task and provide students with certain pieces of information as a beginning for the task.

The sample students were provided with one topic in order to enable raters to evaluate students’ compositions with a common ground. For example, Heaton (1988) suggested that permitting students to write compositions on a variety of topics cannot give the markers a common ground for evaluation. In addition, the difficulty levels of the different types of writing tasks, which can be made on a variety of topics, could not be the same. For example, a topic which calls for argumentation, and another topic that requires explanation would not be equally demanding for students to write on.

After the administration of the writing examination, the marking task of the students’ pieces of writings was undertaken. To accomplish this task, analytic scoring technique which was adapted from Jacobs, et al (1981) as quoted in Reid (1993 pp. 236-237) ESL Composition Profile was employed. This Scale is widely used in ESL writing tests. Although it is a commonly used standardized rating scale, an attempt was made to modify it taking into consideration the teaching-learning process of English language in general and EFL writing in particular in Ethiopia, the students’ skills and knowledge of English language, the nature of the writing tasks incorporated in the Grade 11 English textbook.

The researcher preferred analytical scale to holistic scale as the former is highly reliable than the latter. According to Madson (1983), using specific criteria could help markers to evaluate the compositions correctly and consistently. Also, analytic scoring helped the present
researcher to investigate students’ compositions based on the specific writing skills which students rated in the self-efficacy questionnaire.

Each student’s piece of writing was marked by two raters, for it would help the researcher to ensure reliability of the scores of students participated in the test. According to Best and Kahn (2003), during evaluating a composition computing inter-rater reliability can help minimize subjectivity. So, each student’s composition was evaluated and marked by two raters; both of the markers were PhD holders in TEFL and well experienced in teaching and assessing writing courses at university level. And before the two raters scored the compositions, they discussed about how they could evaluate and mark the compositions. Furthermore, the markers employed the same rating scale.

After the completion of the marking of the students’ compositions, inter-rater reliability was computed and found to be 0.895. According to Best and Kahn (2003), a correlation coefficient of 0.80 and above is high which indicates that the two raters’ reliability is acceptable.

Finally, the average mark of the two raters for each student’s composition was taken for the report of this study.

Data collection procedures

Firstly, five preparatory schools were selected using a lottery system. Next, six groups were selected using stratified sampling technique. Then, the self-efficacy questionnaire was administered; upon the completion of the self-efficacy questionnaire, the writing exam was administered.

Research ethics

The researcher explained the objective of the study to the school principals and asked them for permission to collect data. Similarly, he
genuinely explained to the sample students that the data would be employed for a research purpose; furthermore, he assured that they would remain anonymous. He also told them that they would not be required to write their names on the questioner and the answer sheets used for the examination.

Data analysis

Percentage, mean, standard deviation, and independent t-test were used to check if there were gender differences in students’ self-efficacy beliefs and performance of writing. Likewise, to examine if there were differences in the writing self-efficacy belief and the writing performance among the five sampled schools, mean, ANOVA, and post hoc comparisons were employed.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Data coding and organization

The copies of the questionnaire and the answer sheets for the examination were coded before administering the questionnaire and the test. The purpose of the code was to correlate the students’ self-efficacy beliefs and writing test scores. The code was used with an assumption that it would help the researcher to associate students’ self-efficacy scores with their respective writing examination scores.

The researcher edited the copies of the questionnaire, which were completed by the sampled students, for completeness, accuracy, and uniformity and the compositions, written by the same students, for accuracy. For example, code 68 skipped one item of the questionnaire he/she filled in, and code 2012 did not complete six items of the questionnaire. Similarly, about 19 sample students did not write their compositions accurately. Some of them wrote a few sentences (one up to three sentences). And these sentences were written carelessly and
it was difficult to understand them. A few of them also had problems with paragraphing. Thus, 255 respondents out of 274 sample students, who completed the questionnaire and did the writing task of the examination appropriately, were taken for the report of the study.

The questionnaire data

First, the study aimed at investigating the learners’ self-efficacy belief of writing, and in relation to it the following research question was raised:

What is the students’ self-efficacy of writing?

A writing self-efficacy questionnaire was distributed to 274 students to collect data, but only 255 respondents correctly completed the copies of the questionnaire which had 16 items. For each item, a mean value of the 255 students’ scores and then the aggregate mean for the mean value of the 16 items were computed. Finally, the data was analyzed using mean, independent t-test, and one-way ANOVA. The detail will be discussed as follows:
Table 1: The minimum, maximum and mean values for each item of students’ writing self-efficacy scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correctly write the spellings of all words when writing an essay in English</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>62.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use punctuation marks correctly</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>60.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correctly use all parts of speech</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>54.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write simple sentences with correct grammar in a composition</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>58.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correctly write complex sentences in a composition</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>53.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correctly write compound sentences in a composition</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>53.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correctly use singulars (nouns/verbs) in a composition</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>61.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correctly use plurals (nouns/verbs) in a composition</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>60.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correctly use verb tenses in a composition</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>57.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correctly use suffixes and prefixes in a composition</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>60.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write an essay with a good introduction,</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>56.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write an essay with adequate supports/ details</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>50.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>end an essay with a good conclusion</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>55.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discuss ideas well focusing on the topic in hand</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>56.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write a reasoned argument with strong supports</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>52.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correctly use connectors/linking words in a composition</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>62.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand mean</strong></td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>74.9</td>
<td>57.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 above presents the minimum, maximum and mean values of each of the 16 items. Specifically, both the minimum and maximum values of each item were presented and the mean value for the minimum self-efficacy scores is 32.8 where as the mean for the maximum self-efficacy scores is 74.9. Similarly, the mean values computed for each of the 16 items and the aggregate mean values were indicated in the same Table. That is, firstly, the mean values of each of the items of the writing self-efficacy scale were computed, and the analysis indicated that there were not much variations among the means of each, the highest being 62.57 (I can correctly write the spellings of all words when writing an essay in English) and the lowest being 50.59 (I can write an essay with adequate supports/ details). Although it seems that there is a difference at least between the item
with the highest mean value and the item with the lowest mean, all the means of the 16 items can be found in the same category, that is, average. The aggregate mean value for the means of the 16 items of the questionnaire is 57.40; that is, most participant students judged their writing capability as moderate. But although it is found in the category of moderate, it is closer to the low level of self-efficacy.

Second, the study aimed to examine gender differences in the students’ self-efficacy belief of writing, and in accordance with it, the following research question was posed: *Is there a significant gender difference in the students’ self-efficacy belief of writing?*

Descriptive statistics, independent t-test, one-way ANOVA, and Post hoc comparison were used in order to answer this research question.

**Table 2: Means of male and female students’ writing self-efficacy scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing Self-efficacy</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>58.84</td>
<td>14.67</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>p&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>55.96</td>
<td>13.97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 above depicts that the mean scores of male students and female students are 58.84 and 55.96, respectively. Here, there is an apparent difference between the means of the two groups even though it is crucial to check whether the difference is significant or not. Thus, it was tried to see whether this observed mean difference was significant or not as follows:

The independent t-test indicated that male and female students show no significant statistical differences in their writing self-efficacy belief (See Table 2 above). That is, the observed value (1.26) is less than the critical value (1.96). This shows that the two groups, male and female students, had almost similar self-efficacy beliefs of writing.
Besides, self-efficacy score differences which might exist among schools were computed using mean, one way ANOVA and Post hoc comparison techniques as follows.

Firstly, the mean values for the self-efficacy scores for the five sample schools were computed and they are shown in the following figure.

![Figure 1: Mean values of the self-efficacy beliefs of the five schools](image)

As figure 1 portrays, the mean values of students’ self-efficacy scores of EFL writing in some of the sampled schools show variations. That is, Deneba General and Preparatory School students have the lowest
score of self-efficacy belief of writing (50.52) and Seladingay General and Preparatory School students have the highest score of self-efficacy belief of writing (64.96) in comparison to the other selected school students.

In addition, the means and the standard deviations of the self-efficacy scores of the same schools were indicated in the subsequent table.

**Table 3: Means and Std Deviations of writing self-efficacy scores among schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Chacha</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>55.10</td>
<td>13.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ankober</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>56.11</td>
<td>15.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Seladigay</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>11.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Deneba</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>50.52</td>
<td>15.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Hailemariam Mamo</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>57.38</td>
<td>14.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated above in Figure 1 and Table 3, the mean scores of the students’ self-efficacy of writing in certain schools are different. Similarly, the values of the standard deviations of each of the schools are high which implies that there are high variations of scores in self-efficacy among different participants. Furthermore, an attempt was made to check if the mean differences were significant. To compute the significant levels of the differences, one-way ANOVA was employed (Table 4).

**Table 4: One way ANOVA for differences in writing self-efficacy among schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F (Observed Value)</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>P&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>250</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>254</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 depicts that there are significant differences in writing self-efficacy among the schools (at P<0.05). Meaning, when one sees the ‘Numerator/Denominator df (4df/250df) in the F-table, the critical value of F is 2.37 at the .05 level of significance. This implies that the observed value of F (4.72) is greater than the critical Value of F (2.37) which implies that the differences are significant. But, this does not show which particular schools show significant differences. So, a post hoc test was employed to identify the specific schools which could show significant differences in self-efficacy belief of writing. Accordingly, the test indicated that the differences between Chacha and Seladingay, Deneba and Seladingay, and Ankober and Seladingay were significant.

In fact, as mentioned above, the mean of Seladingay General and Preparatory School was the highest of the five sampled schools whereas the mean value for Deneba General and Preparatory School was lowest next to Deneba, Chacha and Ankober were found to have low mean values of self-efficacy of writing. Furthermore, the Post hoc comparison indicated that there were significant differences in the students’ self-efficacy beliefs of writing between Chacha and Seladingay, Deneba and Seladingay, and Ankober and Seladingay. This means that students in different schools had disproportional self-efficacy beliefs of writing.

The writing examination data

The third purpose of the present study was to investigate students’ writing performance. On top of that, the study aimed to identify the specific writing components in which students show serious flaws. Thus, the following research question was posed.

What is the students’ performance of writing?

Students were asked to write a composition on a given thesis statement which was adapted from IELTS test items. Two hundred
fifty-five students wrote the compositions following the instructions given to them. Each of the students’ compositions was marked by two raters, and the average was taken for the report of this study. The two markers’ inter-rater reliability was computed, and the result was observed to be high.

Moreover, the criteria used by raters for scoring students’ compositions were the same as those specific writing activities in which respondents were asked to judge their writing self-efficacy. These criteria included content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics.

It was also tried to determine the particular writing components in which students could show serious flaws. To this end, analytic scoring technique was employed.

To make the analysis, mean, independent t-test, one-way ANOVA, and Post hoc comparison were used as indicated below:

Before analyzing the data, the students’ exam scores were categorized as high, average, and low based on the criteria designed by the Ministry of Education which was used by Adane and Dawit (2000, pp. 54-55) as a cut-off point to identify high achievers, average achievers, and low achievers among the subjects of their study. That is to say, students’ scores that are 80 and above are labeled as high, those scores from 50 - 79 are considered as average, and the scores below 50 are categorized as low. Based on these demonstrations, from a total of 255 selected students, 22 students scored from 50 - 79 (average) and 233 students scored below 50 (low). In other words, of the 255 students, no high achievers were observed; and most of them could be categorized as low achievers of EFL writing. In fact, the majority of them could not get a passing mark (in the writing exam) to the next grade. Furthermore, the total mean of the students’ writing exam scores is 31.14 with the standard deviation of 11.50. This shows that most students’ writing performance is below average. In other words, the majority of the sample students are low achievers of EFL
writing. According to the cut-off points indicated above, 31.14 is labeled as low which implies that most students are categorized as low achievers of writing exams.

Furthermore, it was tried to identify the particular components of writing in which students demonstrated serious weaknesses. The data analysis result indicated that the students’ writing examination scores in content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics were 7.2, 6.1, 5.9, 4.8, and 3.4, respectively. These average scores for all the five components were considered as inadequate when they are seen in the light of the weights given to each component of writing of the scoring guide used in this study.

Besides, an attempt was made to examine if gender difference existed in the writing performances of students, and it is shown in the following table.

Table 5: Means and Std Deviations of the male students and the female students’ exam scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance of EFL Writing</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>34.27</td>
<td>11.10</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>P&lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>28.00</td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>31.14</td>
<td>11.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it is shown in Table 5, the mean values of male students and female students are 34.27 and 28.00, respectively which implies that there is a difference in writing performance between the two groups. But since it was necessary to determine whether the difference was significant or not, an attempt was made to test the significant level of the differences using independent t-test. And the independent t-test depicts that boys and girls are significantly different in their performances of EFL writing. In other words, the observed t-value (4.34) is less than the critical value (at the 253 degree of freedom), and it is observed that the mean value
of male students’ writing test scores is greater than the mean value of female students’ writing exam scores. In other words, girls have lower writing performances than their male counterparts.

The following figure shows the means of the different schools.

Figure 2: Mean values of the students’ EFL writing exam scores in the five schools

As shown in figure 2 above, there are differences among the mean values of the schools. The figure portrays that the mean value of
Chacha Preparatory and General Secondary School students’ EFL writing exam scores is the highest. By contrast, the mean value of Hailemariam Mamo Preparatory School students’ EFL writing exam scores is the lowest. Furthermore, the mean differences observed among the five schools with their respective standard deviations are shown below.

**Table 6: Means and Standard Deviations of writing performance scores among schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Chacha</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>36.64</td>
<td>11.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ankober</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>29.55</td>
<td>12.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Seladingay</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33.20</td>
<td>8.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Deneba</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30.74</td>
<td>10.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Hailemariam Mamo</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>26.04</td>
<td>12.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 shows the variations in the mean values and the standardization of writing exam scores among the different sample schools. It was also tried to check if these differences were significant or not, and so a one-way ANOVA was employed for this purpose. See the following table.

**Table 7: One way NOVA test for differences in writing performances among schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F (Observed Value)</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.83</td>
<td>P&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>250</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>254</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 depicts that the observed F-value is 7.83 which is greater than the F-critical value (2.37) at the 0.05 level of significance. This implies that students in the different schools have different levels of writing performance. Furthermore, a post hoc test was employed to identify the particular schools which showed significant differences. In fact,
significant differences were observed between Chacha and Ankober, Chacha and Hailemariam Mamo, and Seladingay and Hailemariam Mamo.

Writing self-efficacy and performance correlation

Finally, the relationship between students’ writing self-efficacy and writing performance was computed. And the Pearson Correlation analysis shows that the students’ writing self-efficacy and their writing performances scores is $r = .277$ which is significant at 0.01 levels. Although the correlation is low, the result shows that students who judged and rated their EFL writing capability as high scored high on their writing examination, and those who rated their writing self-efficacy as low got low scores on their writing examination.

Discussions

Unlike the behaviorist theory which considers human beings as passive reactors to environmental stimuli, the social cognitive theory views individuals as proactive or those who actively participate in understanding their environment. And self-efficacy, rooted in social cognitive theory, as Dornyei (2001) noted, is an individual’s belief regarding his/her capability to accomplish specific tasks which again affect his/her choice of activities, the amount of effort he/she exerts on the activities, and the perseverance he/she shows when he/she faces challenges during doing specific tasks.

Thus, writing self-efficacy in this study is defined as a student’s belief about his/her capability to write in English, his/her motivation to do writing home works and assignments, and his/her persistence during doing writing tasks. In line with this, students’ self-efficacy belief can be categorized as low, moderate and high. According to Bandura (2006), in a standard self-efficacy scale, a self-efficacy score below 50 is low, a score above 50 but which approximates it is moderate, and a value of 100 and nearer to it is high.
In this study, learners were asked to demonstrate their capabilities in certain specific writing tasks using a writing self-efficacy questionnaire ranging in 10 unit intervals from 0 (I cannot do at all) through intermediate degree of assurance 50 (I can do moderately) to complete assurance 100 (I am highly certain to do). Accordingly, the aggregate mean value of the students’ writing self-efficacy scores is 57.40 which, according to Bandura (2006), can be labeled as moderate. This mean value (57.40) also suggests that a significant number of students exhibited lower level of self-efficacy belief of writing as it implies that there are several students who believe that they can score below 50 (low marks) in a writing exam.

The mean value for each item of the writing self-efficacy questionnaire was also calculated, and the finding revealed that the highest mean value was 62.57 (I can correctly write spellings of all words in a composition) and the lowest was 50.59 (I can write a composition in English with adequate details). Thus, there is a discrepancy at least between the item with highest mean value and the other item having the lowest mean which implies that most students believe that they had disproportional writing capabilities. Furthermore, when one sees the item with the highest mean value and the other item with the lowest mean, the former is about mechanics (spelling) and the latter is about content of writing.

As indicated above the data analysis result indicated that there are many students who believe that they have low writing capability and this might be related to the approaches teachers use in writing lessons. That is, the approaches and teaching methods teachers employ in the EFL writing classes might not help learners to develop their confidence to write although it was possible to do this through employing, for example, a process approach of teaching writing combined with provisions of feedbacks on students’ pieces of writings.

The study also attempted to examine gender differences in the students’ self-efficacy belief of writing, and the mean scores of male
students and female students are 58.84 and 55.96, respectively, and the independent t-test proved that the difference which existed between the mean values of the two groups was not statistically significant (See Table 3 above). This shows that the male students and their female counterparts have almost similar self-efficacy beliefs of writing. This result agrees with the findings of Pajares, Miller and Johnson (1999), Williams and Takaku (2011), and Hashemnejad, Zogi, and Amni (2014) which revealed that there was no significant gender difference in self-efficacy belief of writing between boys and girls. In contrast, this same research finding is inconsistent with the research results of Anteneh (2005) and Shkullaku (2013). So, the present research finding supports the argument which claims that there is no significant gender difference in students’ self-efficacy belief of writing. This shows that gender has no effect on students’ confidence to write in English in the context of North Shoa Zone.

Third, the mean values of students’ self-efficacy scores of EFL writing in the five sampled schools were computed, and the finding indicated that the lowest mean value was 50.52 (Deneba General and Preparatory School) and the highest was 64.96 (Seladingay General and Preparatory School). And a one-way ANOVA (see Table 6 above) was used to check if there was a significant difference between these mean values, and it portrayed that the difference was significant. On top of that, post hoc test was employed to identify particular schools which could show significant differences, and the test indicated that there were significant differences between Chacha and Seladingay, Deneba and Seladingay, and Ankober and Seladingay. This reflects that self-efficacy is context dependent which is consistent with Kumaravadivelu’s (2003) conception which suggests that language pedagogy, to be relevant, should be sensitive to the local institutional and social contexts in which the teaching-learning processes are undertaken. Obviously, what is appropriate for one context might not be suitable for another context (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).
Indeed, the teaching-learning process of EFL writing varies from one school to other school, and it is necessary to identify particular schools which require special support regarding enhancing students’ self-efficacy belief of EFL writing. It is impossible to conclude that students in all schools require the same support, that is, the levels of learners’ self-efficacy beliefs in various schools seem to be different.

Fourth, the study investigated the students’ ability to write effective composition in English.

Out of 255 students who sat for the writing examination, 233 of them scored below 50, and the remaining 22 students’ exam results could fall in the range of 50 and 79. No high achievers were observed in the study. This shows that most of the sampled students were low achievers of EFL writing; in fact, they could not get a passing mark in the writing exam. In addition, the total mean of the students’ writing exam score was 31.14, which supports the above result.

Also, the components of writing in which students demonstrated serious problems were identified; as the data analysis result revealed, the students’ writing examination scores in content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics were 7.2, 6.1, 5.9, 4.8 and 3.4, respectively. These scores could be found in the category labeled as inadequate when they are seen in the light of the weights given to each component of writing of the scoring guide used in this study. In addition, the scores students got are found in the same category which implies that there is no variation among the components. On the other hand, the students showed uniform performances in all sub-skills or components of EFL writing, and also their compositions indicated the same serious flaws in all of the sub-skills of writing.

Fifth, an attempt was made to examine if there was gender difference in the students’ performance of EFL writing, and the finding revealed that the mean values of male students and female students were 34.27
and 28.00, respectively which seems that there is a difference in writing performance between the two groups. And the independent t-test depicts that the difference is significant in favor of boys. This finding is consistent with the findings of Pajares, Miller, and Johnson (1999), Anteneh (2005), and Williams and Takaku (2011).

Sixth, the levels of students’ performances of writing in the schools selected for the study were computed, and the finding revealed that the differences that existed among these schools were significant as it was proved using one-way ANOVA. Furthermore, a post hoc test was employed, and the particular schools which showed significant differences were identified. Thus, significant differences were revealed between Chacha and Ankober, Chacha and Hailemariam Mamo, and Seladingay and Hailemariam Mamo.

Seventh, students’ self-efficacy belief of writing was correlated with their performance of writing, and the Pearson Correlation analysis showed that the two variables were significantly correlated at 0.01 levels. That is, those learners who rated their EFL writing capability high scored high on their writing test, and those who rated their writing self-efficacy low got low scores on the same exam. This finding is consistent with the findings of McCarthy, Meir and Rinderer (1985) and Pajares and Johnson (1994).

Conclusion

Based on the above discussions, the following conclusions are drawn:

- The analysis made on students’ self-efficacy belief of writing demonstrated that several students had low confidence to write in English and there were no students who exhibited high self-efficacy belief. This shows that the way students learn writing lessons at preparatory school levels has little significance to enhance students’ self-efficacy belief of EFL writing.
The finding revealed that there is no significant gender difference in students’ self-efficacy belief of writing.

Significant differences in self-efficacy belief of writing were observed among schools and thus, it is possible to conclude that students’ self-efficacy level in writing varies from school to school because self-efficacy is context dependent and different schools might have unique and particular ways of administration and teaching-learning processes. Each school can have particular ways of teaching, educational facilities, ways of administration, etc.

According to the analysis of the students’ exam scores, 233 out of 255 students scored below 50, and the mean value of the students' exam scores were 31.14. Thus, it is possible to conclude that most students have very low performances of EFL writing.

The finding revealed that there was a significant gender difference in the students’ performance of writing. Thus, performance of EFL writing varies among gender. Students in different schools showed significant differences in their performance of writing which implies that the teaching learning process of writing, the approaches teachers employ to teach writing, the students’ experience of writing, etc. might vary from school to school.

The students’ self-efficacy belief and performance of writing demonstrated a positive strong correlation, and this implies that enhancing students’ writing self-efficacy is one way of promoting students' writing performance. In other words, helping students to improve the belief they have about their capability of writing means helping them to improve their writing performances.

**Recommendations**

Based on the above conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are forwarded:
English language teachers should enhance their students’ self-efficacy belief of EFL writing by providing them with enough writing practices accompanied by teacher feedback if students are to develop the skill and confidence to write in English.

The schools should consider students background in English to identify those who need more support. This could be done by conducting a diagnostic test to identify the students that need support.

Special attention should be given to girls that have poor experience in writing in English if we are to work towards equity in gender at preparatory schools.

Research needs to be conducted on the following topics to understand more about the writing lessons.

- A methodological analysis of the writing lessons incorporated in the preparatory school English language text book.
- The teaching learning process of writing at preparatory school level.

References


