The Relationships of Self-esteem, Attitudes, and Gender to Achievement in Writing: Bahir Dar University First Year Students in Focus

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Abstract: The study examined the relationships of self-esteem, attitudes, and gender to achievements in writing. It also explored gender differences in the variables treated. For the study, 272 participants were selected using multistage and purposive sampling techniques. To gather data, different scales and tests were used. Parametric tests such as t-test, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, and multiple regressions were the major statistical techniques applied to analyze the data. The results revealed that male students surpass female students in all the variables treated. It was also found that the relationships of most of the variables were significant except for the non-significant relationships of writing self-esteem and writing attitude to global self-esteem and academic self-esteem to writing self-esteem. Moreover, the output of the multiple regressions showed that the predictor variables in combination account for 40% of the variances in writing achievement. Writing self-esteem and writing attitudes were found to be the best predictors among the independent variables. The findings seem to suggest that attention be paid to the correlates of students' writing skills.

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Introduction

In the history of language teaching, Brown (1987, p. 10) says, "As schools of thought have come and gone, so have language teaching methods [and approaches] waxed and waned in popularity." The humanistic approach is a case in point. In connection with this, Williams and Burden (1997) say that the humanistic methods are concerned with learners' involvement in the learning process. Williams and Burden further argue that treating students as human beings or taking learners' interest, attitudes, self-beliefs, and so forth into consideration in the English language teaching learning process minimizes foreign language anxiety, enhances language self-esteem, and above all, makes the teaching learning process more meaningful and more effective. This is because, self beliefs, interest, attitudes, gender and the like are considered as major variables in the prediction of academic achievement from non-cognitive variables (Lyon, 1993; Campbell, 1984; Brookover et al., 1964). Also, it could be contended that “no cognitive endeavor could be carried out successfully without a considerable degree of self confidence, knowledge of self, and beliefs in one’s capabilities for the endeavor” (Brown (1981, p. 114).

There have been various studies of self-esteem and its relation to gender and academic achievement, but the results have been inconsistent (Maruyama, et al., 1981). Some researchers Skaalvik and Rankin (1990 and Skaalvik (1986) argue that males have higher self-esteem than females in general. Others (Marsh, 1990; Marsh, Byrne and Shavelson, 1988; Byrne, 1984; Hanford and Hattie, 1982) contend that there is no significant difference between male and female in general self-esteem. Still others (Cornell, et al. 1990; Skaalvik, 1990, Brookover, 1964) argue that male and female have different subject specific self-esteem.

However, the type of discipline or the nature of a given task affects female students' self-evaluations. In connection with this, different scholars (e.g. Marsh, Smith and Barnes, 1985; Lott, 1978) contend that male students tend to have high self-esteem in mechanical and mathematical courses, whereas

female children tend to have high self-esteem in (and positive attitudes towards) language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening). For this reason, girls seem to be less anxious when they face writing tasks, assignments or exams, and have a stronger perception of the value of and positive attitude towards writing, confidence in their own ability to write even in various stressful situations, and so on. This has been true in the context of developed nations where male and female have almost equal access to education and social status that would help them develop the necessary attitudes and academic self-esteem. However, it seems hard to believe that this could also hold true in developing countries like Ethiopia where there are different factors (e.g. cultural influence and sex stereotyping) which would affect female students' education, self beliefs, and life in general.

Even though every society uses sex as a criterion to describe gender, no two cultures would completely agree on what distinguishes one gender from another (Doyle, 1998; Wallace and Marsh, 1991; Bank and Good, 1980). In relation to this, it is claimed that every individual's gender is built into the social order and consists of relations that develop over time to define male and female, and is deeply embedded in every aspect of society-in institutions, public places, and/or in all settings from government offices to the street (Eckert and Mcconnell-Ginet, 2003). From this, one could sense that gender differences are likely to be culture or place specific. This in turn leads to an argument that gender and its relation to language performance and related affects such as self-esteem and attitudes can reveal different results in different countries. This area is, therefore, worthy of investigation in the Ethiopian context.

Most importantly, though some research findings (e.g. Skaalvik, 1990) have shed light on gender differences in language skills and in such personal factors as self-concept (that refers to a description of oneself) and confidence, the differences between male and female students' self-esteem (evaluations of self worth), attitudes, and writing skills, especially at tertiary level, are scantly studied. From this, one can sense that the area still requires further investigation.

Another point worth mentioning, even though documented evidence (e.g. NCES, 1990) assert that writing is the most important skill for anyone who is struggling for success in the world of education , a great number of university students are hardly able to express their ideas clearly in writing (Rivers, 1981). This is a serious problem in the context of Ethiopian higher institutions. A case in point is that students were found deficient in writing in Addis Ababa University (Italo, 1999). As far as this writer's experience goes, the problem is getting worse and worse. For instance, a great number of freshman students in Bahir Dar University are not good at writing. Also, it was found that first year male students surpassed female students in writing in Arbaminch University (Bekele, 2005). From this, one can understand that the problem seems more serious among female students in spite of the widely accepted generalization that females are good at language skills and related affects. It seems, therefore, essential to investigate gender and its relations with students' writing achievement, attitudes, and self-esteem. This is because, a study of correlates of academic performance is, as Mohan (1993) says, an initial activity in the process of enhancing quality in education.

On the whole, an investigation of the interrelationship among the variables under study (self-esteem, gender, attitudes and writing achievement of students) seems to be of great importance, as it could contribute a lot to the improvements of students' academic achievement. However, the correlation among these variables has not been researched, especially in the Ethiopian context. This research is, therefore, devoted to investigating the relationship of self-esteem, attitudes and gender to writing achievement.

Objectives

The major objectives of this study are to:

- study the interrelationship between students' self-esteem, attitudes, gender, and writing achievement;
- investigate the extent to which gender, attitudes and self-esteem

(global, academic, and writing self-esteem) independently and in combination contribute to the prediction of students' writing achievement at university level; and
- examine gender differences in self-esteem, attitudes and writing achievement.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the research objectives, the following questions have been asked.

- Are there significant relationships between students' self-esteem, attitudes, and gender and their writing achievement?
- What are the independent and group contributions of self-esteem, attitudes, and gender in predicting students' achievements in writing?
- Are there significant gender differences in self-esteem, attitudes and writing achievement?

Methods

Participants

The participants were students who were attending sophomore English classes in Bahir Dar University in 2007/2008 academic year. There were 1672 students taking the course sophomore English. Among these, 300 students (166 males and 134 females) were selected using both multistage and purposive sampling techniques. To make it clearer, it was decided to randomly select 6 departments using a lottery method from the target departments (in which students were taking sophomore English). Accordingly, Economics, Civil Engineering, Accounting, Journalism, Computer Science, and Animal science departments were selected. Then, one section that consists of 50 students from each of the selected departments was taken, as there were more than 2 sections in each of the departments.

To keep the uniformity of school background of students, 4 students (3 males and 1 female) who attended high school in private schools were excluded from the sample, so all the subjects were students who attended government high schools. Also, 8 students (6 males and 2 females) who did not return the questionnaires, and 11 students who did not take one or two of the tests (for unknown reasons) were excluded from the sample. Moreover, 4 students who had an English score below 50 and above 90 in the college entrance English examination were excluded to avoid exceptional cases. Similarly, one student who was 29 years old was rejected in the process of excluding exceptional cases, as the subjects' age ranges from 18-23. Consequently, the number of participants was reduced to 272 (159 male and 113 female students), which is 16.26 % of the size of the total study population.

Instruments

Self-esteem measures: Self-esteem was measured in three levels of specificity (i.e. global, academic and subject specific levels).

At the global level, the 10 item Rozenberg self-esteem scale (Rozenberg, 1979, cited in Brodsky, 1988) was adapted and applied. This scale measures the general self-esteem apart from any content (subject) area self-esteem, and includes items such as "I certainly feel useless at times", "I feel that I have a number of good qualities". Each of the items has 5 responses (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, do not know) scored from 4 to 0 (with appropriate reversals for the items that should be reverse scored, but "Do not know" which has a value of 0 is not subject to reverse scoring). So there would be a maximum 40 and a minimum 0 score of global self-esteem. A high score thus obviously indicates high global self-esteem. The reliability of this scale has been demonstrated in several studies; for instance, Wells (1988) reported that the Crombach's alpha for this scale had been found to be .95. In this study the Crombach's alpha was found to be .84.

At the academic level, the general academic self-esteem scale (GASES) developed by Skaalvik (1986) was adapted and applied to measure students academic self-esteem. This scale involves 14 items; for instance, "I think that I am good at my school work (education)", "I wish it were easier to understand what I read." Each item has 5 responses (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, do not know) scored from 4 to 0 (with appropriate reversals, but "Do not know", which has a value of 0 is not subject to reverse scoring). There would be a maximum 56 and minimum 0 academic self-esteem score, so a high score shows high academic self-esteem. The reliability of this scale was demonstrated in several research works, for example, the Crombach's alpha in two different investigations was shown to be .80 and .81 (Skaalvik, 1990). And the Crombach's alpha in the present study was found to be .76.

At a specific level, the academic self-description questionnaire (ASDQII) developed by March (1992) cited in Pietsch, Walker and Chapman (2003) was developed and used to measure students' self-esteem in writing. This scale has 9 items like "writing is one of my favorite activities", "I often need help in writing tasks". Each item has 5 responses (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, do not know) scored from 4 to 0 (with appropriate reversals, but "Do not know", which has a value of 0, is not subject to reverse scoring). There would be a maximum 36 and minimum 0 writing self-esteem score, so a high score indicates high writing self-esteem. Pietsch, Walker and Chapman (2003) reported that the Crombach's alpha for this scale had been found to be .89. In the current study, its internal consistency (Crombach alpha) was found to be .83.

Attitude Measure: To measure students' writing attitude, Rhody Secondary reading attitude assessment scale (Conley, 1992) was adapted and used. This scale involves 20 items; for instance, "I dislike writing tasks", "I like to practise writing whenever I get free time both in class and outside of class." Each item has 5 responses (strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree,) scored from 5 to 1 (with appropriate reversals. There would be a maximum 100 and a minimum 20 writing attitude score, so a high

score shows highly positive attitude towards writing. The Crombach alpha of this scale in the present study was found to be .73.

Essay Writing test: In line with the procedures used by different researchers (e.g. Pajares, 2003), One day after completing the questionnaires. The students were asked to write a 40 min essay entitled "The Qualities of a Good Teacher". Again, three days after the first test, students were asked to write a 40 min essay entitled "The Person I like most".

The writing topics were selected on the basis of the assumption that students were familiar with these topics so that they would not be faced with difficulty in generating information to write. Besides, these topics were assumed to be motivating to all students, as they would trigger motivation for writing. Above all, these topics were selected taking the guiding principles of test writing (using essay writing tests) into account. In addition, factors in grading tasks (learner factors like students' background; activity factors, for instance the relevance of the task, and input factors like time availability) were taken into consideration so as to avoid extraneous factors, which would affect students' performance. In short, the tests were prepared in accordance with the principles of measurement and evaluation in general and that of testing writing in particular.

Though assessing students' writing skills using free (essay) writing tests may be felt to be subjective, scholars in the field of writing (e.g. Kitao and Kitao, 2000; Heaton, 1990; Byrne, 1988) assert that direct evaluations of writing (i.e. collecting a written text) provides more valid assessments than the indirect evaluations. Free-writing test was thus selected and used to assess students' writing achievement in this study. To reduce subjectivity, essays were marked by two markers who are experienced lecturers in teaching writing courses like sophomore English and advanced writing skills (at University level). Most importantly, the markers were oriented to apply the analytic and multiple marking techniques with marking criteria, such as density (adequacy of contents or ideas), organization (arrangement of

contents), accuracy (correct use of grammar), language mechanics etc. Each criterion has 4 point scales (3, 2, 1, and 0 with appropriate descriptions). There would be a maximum 15 and minimum 0 score of writing performance (in each test). In line with this, the sum of the scores of the two tests (for each student) was taken as a measure of writing achievement. The consistency between the two markers (for each test) was calculated and found to be .87 and .89 respectively. This, obviously, implies that the markers were consistent.

Procedure

For the purpose of piloting the instruments and the procedure, 30 students (15 males and 15 females) were randomly selected from three sections (10 students from each). Then, they were provided with the questionnaires, but two students did not return the questionnaires, and as a result, the number of students involved in the pilot study was 28.

Even though the measures had already been standardized and their reliability and validity established, it was felt that it would be worthwhile to check their reliability, as the time, environment, culture, and social situations in which the measures were standardized and were obviously different from the current situations in Ethiopia. For this reason, before collecting the actual data, the instruments were adapted, and pre-tested (using students who were not selected for the study). As a result, attempts were made to modify the instruments, for instance, items that were detected as culture specific and confusing to the subjects were rephrased (simplified) to make the items culture free, appropriate and comprehensible to the subjects.

Then, an attempt was made to create conducive conditions to select representative sample from the total population with the help of some instructors. As a result, the participants were appropriately selected using the necessary sampling techniques. The selected subjects were then told the purpose of the study, and were also asked if they were interested to participate. All of them strongly agreed to participate. In addition, the

respondents were told that their responses would be kept anonymous (to help them feel free). They were told to write their identification numbers but not their names (on the questionnaires and on the tests). The participants were also made aware of the nature of the scales; for instance, they were convinced of the need to complete all the required information, and to work on their own on the basis of their own feelings, as there was no right or wrong answer to each of the items. Furthermore, after checking that the respondents had understood what they were expected to do, the researcher with the help of three assistants administered the questionnaires. Finally, after the questionnaires had been collected, the first and the second writing tests were administered respectively with an interval of three days. The rationale is that in assessing students' writing achievement, administering two or more tests is desirable, as a test administered once is supposed to be less valid than two or more tests administered with an interval of some days.

Techniques of Data Analysis

For the purpose of data analysis, female students were given a code of 0, and male students were given a code of 1 on the basis of dummy variable coding (Peers, 1990). To show the overview of the findings and for the purpose of comparison, such descriptive statistics as means, and standard deviations were calculated. T-test was also used to compare the mean scores of male and female students in attitudes, self-esteem (global, academic and writing self-esteem), and in writing performance. Then, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was applied to examine the interrelationship of the variables treated in the study. Finally, multiple regression analysis was employed to scrutinize the independent and group contributions of the predictor variables in forecasting first year students' writing performance in the university.

Results and Discussion

Results

First some descriptive statistics will be displayed. Then the results of the t-test will follow. Presenting the correlation matrix of the variables will be the other section of this part of the paper. The remaining part pertains to the multiple regression analyses devoted to identifying the proportion of students' writing achievement accounted for by the major predictor variables independently as well as in group.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for All Variables Treated in the Study (n=272)

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
GLOB. SE	11	36	25.68	5.62
ACAD. SE	19	52	33.34	5.96
WRIT. SE	12	36	24.80	5.06
WRIT. ATT	26	84	54.75	13.14
WRIT. ACH	5.5	26	15.28	4.31

Note: GLOB. SE: Global self-esteem; ACAD. SE: Academic self-esteem; WRIT. SE: writing self-esteem; WRIT. ATT: writing attitude; WRIT. ACH: writing achievement

As indicated in Table 1, the mean score of students' global self-esteem, academic self-esteem, writing self-esteem, writing attitude and writing achievement seem a bit more than the expected average scores (20, 28, 18, 50, and 15 respectively). One can infer from these results that the majority of students have more than average global self-esteem, academic self-esteem, writing self-esteem and writing achievements.

Table 2: Gender Differences in Self-esteem, Attitudes, and in Writing Performance

Variables	Male (n=159)		Female (113)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
GLOB. SE	26.44	5.6	24.60	5.41	2.69	.00
ACAD. SE	34.59	6.03	31.57	5.39	4.24	.00
WRIT. SE	26.37	5.01	22.60	4.25	6.50	.00
Writ. ATT	60.47	11.76	46.70	10.52	9.93	.00
WRIT. ACH	17.00	4.10	12.85	3.33	8.85	.00

As shown in Table 2, male students scored higher means than female students on the variables treated. The t-test also reveals significant gender differences (favoring male students) in all of the variables under comparison (t=2.69, p<.01; t=4.24, p<.01; t=6.50, p<.01; t=9.93, p<.01 t=8.85, p<.01) respectively. In other words, male students' self-esteem (global self-esteem, academic self-esteem, and writing self-esteem) and writing attitude are higher than female students'. Males also seem to surpass females in writing.

From the results seen above, it could be inferred that the associations of the variables among boys and girls are likely to be different. Therefore, Tables 3 and 4 show the correlation of the major variables among boys and girls. This will help us see if the correlates of writing achievement are similarly significant among boys and girls.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix of the Variables Treated among Male Students (n=159)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB. SE	1				
ACAD. SE	.26**	1			
WRIT. SE	.00	.01	1		
Writ. ATT	.13*	.01	.36**	1	
WRIT. ACH	.28**	.22**	.37**	.41**	1

*** P< .01 (two –tailed)* * P< .05 (two –tailed)*

Table 3 shows that the associations of global self-esteem to academic self-esteem(r=.26, p<.01); to writing attitude (r=.13, p<.05), and to writing performance(r=.28, p<.01) are found to be significant among male students. The relationship between academic self-esteem and writing performance is also found to be significant (r=.22, p<.05). In addition, the relationships of writing self-esteem to writing attitude (r=.36, p<.01) and to writing performance(r=.37, p<.01) are found to be significant. Similarly, the link between writing attitude and writing performance is found to be significant(r=.41, p<.01).

Table 4: Correlation Matrix of the Variables Treated among Female Students (n=113)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB. SE	1				
ACAD. SE	.36**	1			
WRIT. SE	.16*	00	1		
Writ. ATT	.11*	07	.28**	1	
WRIT. ACH	.07	.14*	.09	.33**	

*** P< .01 (two –tailed)* ** P< .05 (two –tailed)*

As indicated in Table 4, the relationship of global self-esteem to academic self-esteem(r=.36, p<.01), to writing self-esteem(r=.16, p<.05), and to writing attitude (r=.11, p<.05), are significant, but its relationship to writing achievement(r=.07, p>.05) is non-significant among female students. It is also shown that the relationship between academic self-esteem and writing achievement is found to be significant ((r=.14, p<.05). Similarly, writing self-esteem and writing attitude (r=.28, p<.01) are significantly interrelated. Most importantly, the link between writing attitude and writing performance(r=.33, p<.01) is found to be significant.

Table 5: Correlation Matrix of the Variables Treated among all Students (n=272)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
GENDER	1					
GLOB. SE	.16*	1				
ACAD. SE	.25**	.33**	1			
WRIT. SE	.36**	.00	.10	1		
Writ. ATT	.51**	.12	.16*	.45**	1	
WRIT. ACH	.47**	.26**	.28**	.40**	.53**	1

*** P< .01 (two –tailed)* ** P< .05 (two –tailed)*

As depicted in table 5, the interrelationships of most of the variables treated were found to be strongly significant. More specifically, the relationships of gender to global self-esteem (r=.16, p<.05); to academic self-esteem (r =.25, p<.01); to writing self-esteem (r=.36, p<.01); to writing attitude (r=.51, p<.01), and to writing performance (r=.47, p<.01) were found to be significant. However, the relationship of gender to global self-esteem seems weak, so one can understand that gender predicts global self-esteem to some extent at university level. The relationships of global self-esteem to academic self-esteem (r=.33, p<.01), and to writing performance (r=.26, p<.01) were found to be significant, but the relationship between global self-esteem and writing performance seems weak, though significant statistically. The relationships of global self-esteem to writing self-esteem (r=.00, p>.05) and to writing attitude (r=.12, p>.05) are zero and insignificant respectively. From these results, one could sense that the predictability of students' writing performance, writing self-esteem and writing attitude from global self-esteem is questionable.

The relationship of academic self-esteem to writing self-esteem (r=.10, p>.05) was found to be non- significant. This shows that academic self-esteem is not an important correlate of writing self-esteem. But the relationship of academic self-esteem to writing performance (r=.28, p<.01) and to writing attitude (r=.16, p<.05) were found to be significant. Most importantly, the correlation of writing self-esteem with writing attitude (r=.45,

p<.01), and with writing performance (r=.40, p<.01) were found to be strongly significant. This appears to show that writing self-esteem is an important predictor of attitudes and achievements in writing. In this connection, the link between writing attitude and writing performance was found to be strongly significant(r= .53, p<.01). The results in turn seem to emphasize the importance of enhancing students' self-esteem and attitudes in writing if students are to improve their writing skills.

In sum, all of the predictors were found to be significant correlates of the criterion variable. For this reason regression analysis of all the independent variables was made to examine the independent and group contribution of the predictors in forecasting writing performance.

Table 6: Summary of Regression Analysis of the Independent and Group Contribution of the Predictors to Writing Achievement among all Students (n=272)

R=.63 R^2=.40 Standard error=3.35 F=36.77 Sig. F=.000	**Variables**	**SEB**	**Beta**	**t**	**p**
	GLOB.SE	.03	.15	2.9	.003
	ACAD.SE	.03	.11	2.3	.021
	WRIT SE	.04	.18	3.3	.001
	WRIT.ATT	.01	.32	5.4	.000
	GENDER	.5	.18	3.2	.001

**p<.00(two –tailed) * p<.05(two-tailed)*

As depicted in Table 6, 40% of the variance in students writing achievement in the freshman program is accounted for by the combination of the predictor variables (R= .63, R^2 = 0.40, $F_{(5,266)}$ = 36.77, p<0.01). This indicates the importance of the predictor variables (treated) for the improvement of students' writing achievement. In other words, this could be an indication of the need for balanced emphasis on treating the predictor variables if

students are to improve their performances in writing. When the independent impact of the factors was scrutinized, writing attitude (β = .32, t=5.4, sig. t=0.00) was found to be the best predictor of writing performance. Besides, gender (β = .18, t=3.2, p < 0.01), writing self-esteem (β =.18, t=3.20, p < 0.01), and global self-esteem (β=.15, p < 0.05) were found to be significant predictors of writing performance. Most importantly, it was found that writing attitude contributes 28 % of the variances in writing achievements. And the contribution of gender was found to be 5%. Besides, the regression analysis showed that each of the two elements of self-esteem (global self-esteem and writing self-esteem) contributes 2%; whereas academic self-esteem contributes only 1% of the variances in students' writing achievement. From these results, one can say that writing attitude determines students' writing performance to a great extent at university level. Also, it seems fair to say that the other independent variables treated in the study have considerable contributions to writing performance (at university level).

However, the observed results above may not remain the same if the variables are treated separately among boys and girls. Table 7 and 8 are, therefore, devoted to checking if the variances in writing achievement accounted for by the predictors independently and in group are similar among boys and girls. This may help to provide directions for future interventions and/ or research.

Table 7: Summary of Regression Analysis on the Independent and Group Contribution of the Predictors to Writing Achievement among Male Students (n=159)

	Variables	**SEB**	**Beta**	**t**	**p**
R=.56 R^2=.31 Standard error=3.4 F=18.02 Sig. F=.000	GLOB.SE	.20	.20	2.93**	.00
	ACAD.SE	.04	.16	2.33*	.02
	WRIT SE	.05	.27	3.85**	.00
	WRIT.ATT	.02	.28	3.97**	.00

**p<.00(two –tailed) * p<.05(two-tailed)*

According to the data shown in Table 7 all of the independent variables seem to be significant predictors of male students' writing performance. That is, global self-esteem (β =.20, t=2.93, p<.00), academic self-esteem (β =.16, t=2.33, p<.05), writing self-esteem (β =.27, t=3.85, p<0.01), and writing attitude (β =.28, t=3.97, p<0.01) play a significant role in predicting writing achievements among male students. Writing attitude contribute 17% of the variances in male students' writing achievements. On the other hand, each writing self-esteem and global self-esteem contributes 6%. But academic self-esteem contributes only 2%. In sum, 31% of the variances in writing achievement is accounted for by the group contributions of all of the treated independent variables among boys (R =.56, R^2= .31, $F_{(4,154)}$ =18.02, p<0.01).

Table 8: Summary of Regression Analysis on the Independent and Group Contribution of the Predictors to Writing Achievement among Female Students (n=113)

	Variables	SEB	Beta	t	p
R=.34 R^2=.13 Standard error=3.17 F=4.03 Sig. F=.000	GLOB.SE	.06	.08	1.7	.09
	ACAD.SE	.06	.08	.85	.37
	WRIT SE	.07	.01	.16	.86
	WRIT.ATT	.03	.33**	.35	.00

**p<.00(two –tailed) * p<.05(two-tailed)*

As displayed in Table 8, the impact of writing attitude (β =.33, t=.35, p<0.01) on writing achievement is found to be significant, where as the influence of global self-esteem (β =.08, t=1.7, p>.05), academic self-esteem (β =.08, t=.85, p>.05), and writing self-esteem (β =.01, t=.16, p>.05) on writing achievement does not reach statistical significance. It is also found that while writing attitude contributes 11% of the variances in writing achievement, each of the other predictors (global self-esteem, academic self-esteem and writing self-esteem) has no significant contribution to the variances in writing

performance. Nevertheless, 13 % of the variances in writing achievement among female students is accounted for by all of the independent variables ($R= .36$, $R^2 = 0.13$, $F_{(4,108)} = 4.03$, $p<0.01$).

Discussion

Gender Differences in Self-esteem, Attitudes and Achievement in Writing

As displayed in Table 4, gender differences in self-esteem (global, academic and writing self-esteem), in writing attitudes and in writing achievements, as portrayed in Table 4, demonstrate that male students outshine female students in all of the three facets of self-esteem global self-esteem, academic self-esteem and writing self-esteem) writing attitudes and in writing achievement($t=2.69$, $p<0.01$; $t=4.24$, $p<0.01$; $t=6.50$, $p<0.01$; $t=9.93$, $p<0.01$; $t=8.85$, $p<0.01$) respectively.

The observed gender differences in global self-esteem are in agreement with the findings of different researchers (e.g. Marsh, 1990 and Skaalvik, 1990) who assert that boys have higher global self-esteem than girls (as measured by the context free Rosenberg self-esteem scale employed in this current study). The observed writing achievement differences between male and female students also seem to agree with a local study by Anteneh (2005) who found that first year male students surpassed female students in writing at Adama University. Similarly, a study conducted in Bahir Dar University showed that first year male students outperformed female students in communicative English tests, which involved essay writing tasks (Bekele, 2007).

However, gender differences in academic self-esteem, as several findings cited in Skaalvik (1990) show, seem less conclusive because the results vary; for instance, some say there are no gender differences (Chapman and Boersma, 1983; Calysn and Kenny, 1977, Carter, Little and Barabasz, 1977), and others claim that male students score higher than female

students (Chiam, 1987; Skaalvik, 1986; Richman, Clark and Brown, 1984; Gutierrez, 1981). Still others argue that female students score higher than male students (Brookover, Paterson and Thomas, 1962).

As already indicated, this study shows that male students surpass female students not only in writing self-esteem and writing attitudes but also in writing achievement. This seems to contradict some previous research findings (e.g. Marsh, Smith and Barnes, 1985) which show that females have higher writing self-esteem, to outperform males in writing tests.

However, the contradiction between the results of this study and that of some previous studies could be attributed to various factors such as the physical, social, and cultural variables which usually affect female students' feelings, emotions, attitudes and behavior especially in the Ethiopian context. In relation to this, Rosenberg (1986), cited in Wigfield et al (1991), claim that girls are more affected by the physical or environmental changes, cultural influence and social norms. As a result, they usually have lower self-esteem, self-confidence and lower achievements. Sprinthall (1994) also argues that due to the influence of culture, men are usually expected to be higher achieving and are given opportunities to achieve more than what women achieve. Similarly, Deci (1974), cited in Vallerand and Reid (1984), contends that boys are encouraged to be more achievement-oriented and independent while girls are encouraged to be dependent and sensitive to social norms. Tamire (2001: 60), also says "… the culture (e.g. child rearing practice) in Ethiopia seems to favor the intellectual and emotional development of males more than that of females".

Overall, the inconsistency of research findings on gender differences in self-esteem and related variables such as attitudes, interest, and achievements in writing are most likely due to the nature of gender. Since gender, as different scholars (e.g. Sunderland, 1994, Eckert and McConnell-ginet, 2003) argue, is a reflection of socially constructed group of behavioral attributes, its effects on achievements and behaviors of people vary based on differences in culture and social norm. By the same token, writing self-esteem, writing attitudes and writing achievements between male and female students vary

from one nation (with different culture, social norms etc) to another.

One specific point worthy of discussion is that some researchers (e.g. March, Smith and Barnes; 1985) argue that females have higher writing self-esteem and writing performance scores than male students, but in this study, the reverse held true, probably due to the various social and cultural forms of tyranny which tend to jeopardize female students' achievements, attitudes, self-esteem, self-confidence, and so forth in the Ethiopian context. In support of this, Alemtsehay (1981) contends that the academic and behavioral disparity (between males and females) stems from the culturally deep-rooted negative attitudes of the society towards girls education.

It is, therefore, reasonable to attribute female students' low self-esteem, writing attitudes and low writing performance to the social and cultural variables which could influence the educational achievements and affects of girls in Ethiopia.

The Relationship of Self-esteem, Attitudes, and Gender to Achievement in Writing

The relationship of the self-esteem variables: global self-esteem, academic self-esteem, and writing self-esteem, and writing attitude to writing achievement ($r=.26$, $p< .01$; $r= .28$, $p<.01$; $r=.40$, $p<.01$; $r=.53$, $p<.01$) respectively is found to be significant. These results are in agreement with several research findings (e.g. Marsh, 1990). These findings imply that self-esteem is a significant correlate of success, job satisfaction and effectiveness in any activity. In relation to this, Derlega and Janda (1986) say that the relationship between success and self-esteem is usually significant. Most importantly, self-esteem development theorists argue that all the three facets of self-esteem are very important affective factors which contribute to the improvement of students' performance in any discipline (Jordan, 1981; Calysn and Kenny, 1977). Brockner and Wallnau (1981) also assert that people suffering from low self-esteem often perform more poorly than high self-esteem individuals in academic settings.

The relationship of each self-esteem variable to academic achievement usually varies. For instance, in this study, as shown in Table 5, the relationship of global self-esteem to writing performance ($r=.26$, $p<.01$) is weaker than the relationship of academic self-esteem, and writing self-esteem to writing performance ($r=.28$, $p<.01$; $r=.40$, $p<.01$) respectively. From this, one could understand that academic self-esteem and writing self-esteem are better predictors of writing achievement than global self-esteem. This could be supported by different researchers (e.g. Shavelson and Bolus, 1982) who found that academic self-esteem and domain-specific self-esteem are more strongly associated with academic performance than global self-esteem.

Another important point to note is that previous studies (e.g. Dusek and Flasherty, 1981, cited in Marsh, Smith and Barnes, 1985) demonstrated a significant relationship between gender and subject specific self-esteem. Similarly, as can be understood from Table 5, the present study shows that gender's relation with academic self-esteem ($r=.25$, $p<.01$), writing self-esteem ($r=.35$, $p<.01$) and writing attitude ($r=.51$, $p<.01$) is stronger than its relation with global self- esteem ($r=.16$, $p<.05$). This could, therefore, imply that gender is less likely to influence students' global self-esteem. Another important result of this study is that the relationship between gender and writing achievement is significant ($r=.47$, $p<.01$). This is similar to the result of previous local study (Bekele, 2005). Such similar results seem to be reflections of deep-rooted gender differences (favoring males) in writing among first year university students in the context of higher institutions in Ethiopia.

In sum, this study, like various other studies reported earlier indicated that academic self-esteem, writing self-esteem and writing attitude more significantly correlate with writing achievement than general self-esteem does. Therefore, students' beliefs in their own capabilities, skills, knowledge and their own judgment of self-worth in and attitudes towards writing are very important non-cognitive variables in language learning and are more likely to influence their writing achievement (Pajares and Giovanni, 2001).

Writing Achievement from Gender, Self-Esteem and Attitudes

On the basis of the multiple regression employed to examine the independent and group contributions of the predictor variables in projecting the writing achievement of first year university students, the proportion of variance that was accounted for by gender as depicted in Table 6 was substantial and significant (β=.18, t = 3.2, p<.01). This shows that gender is a significant predictor of writing performance at university level. This result agrees with the findings of different researchers (e.g. Frieze, et al, 1978; Katz et al., 1977; Block, 1976, Deaux, 1976 cited in Bank and Good, 1980).

Many differences have been documented between the attitudes and achievements of males and that of females, and as a result, gender is found to be a significant predictor of human behavior and/or academic successes and failures. In support of this, Bank and Good (1980) note that substantial differences usually occur in the behaviors, interests, attitudes and academic achievements of male and female students. Generally, gender, in this study, is so significant that gender seems to influence and significantly predict students' writing performance, especially in the Ethiopian context.

The output of the multiple regression analysis, displayed in Table 6, also showed that writing self-esteem and writing attitude are significant predictors of writing performance (β = .18, t=3.3, p<.001; β =3.2, t=5.47, p<.01 respectively). These results seem to imply that writing self-esteem and writing attitude are the most important affects to help students develop their writing skills and/or improve their writing achievement. This could be supported by Pajares (2003) who shows that students' confidence and feelings of self-worth in writing influence their writing motivation and writing performances. Similarly, Scholars (e.g. Brehm, et al., 2002) contend that attitudes, which refer to students' positive or negative opinions towards a given subject or skill, are very important correlates of performance in that subject or skill. Such views in turn seem to be indicative of the importance of enhancing students' writing self-esteem and writing attitude for the development of students' writing skills.

The independent contributions of global self-esteem and academic self-esteem (see Table 6) were also found to be statistically significant (β = .15, t= 2.9, p<.003; β = .11, t= 2.9, p< .021) respectively. These results could also be supported by the results given in Table 5, which show significant relationships of global self-esteem and academic self-esteem to writing performance. It seems important to note that though global self-esteem and academic self-esteem were found to be significant correlates of writing achievement, their independent contributions in projecting students' writing performance at University level seem to be weaker compared to that of the other predictors treated in this study.

In sum, the predictor variables in the present study (global self-esteem, academic self-esteem, writing self-esteem, writing attitude and gender) together determined about 40% of the variations of writing achievements among first year students ($R = .63$, $R^2 = .40$, $F_{(5,266)} = 36.77$, $p<0.01$).

However, separate regression analysis on the independent and group contributions of the major variables (self-esteem and attitude) to writing achievements among boys and girls showed different results. That is, while both self-esteem and attitude variables: (global self-esteem, academic self-esteem, writing self-esteem and writing attitude) significantly contribute to writing achievement among male students, only writing attitude significantly contributes to writing achievement among female students. Such results seem to be attributable to gender, because gender difference in writing is likely to entail differences in the correlates of writing among boys and girls. Thus, it could be argued that different interventions among boys and girls are likely to enhance first year university students' writing achievements especially in the Ethiopian context.

Conclusions and Implications

Conclusions

On the basis of the findings, the following conclusions can be drawn.

There are significant gender differences in all of the three facets of self-esteem, writing attitudes and also in writing achievements favoring male students (in the Ethiopian context).

All of the independent variables are significant predictors, but writing attitude is the best predictor of students' writing performances at university level in the Ethiopian context.

The predictor variables (global self-esteem, academic self-esteem, writing self-esteem and gender) in combination strongly and significantly predict (or determine) student' writing performances at university level; but the independent contributions of global self-esteem and academic self-esteem are inadequate (non-significant) in predicting students' writing performances at university level. The role (contribution) of global self-esteem to writing performance seems insignificant especially among female students.

It can also be concluded that even though girls are supposed to surpass boys both in language self-esteem, attitudes and in language skills, it seems difficult for many Ethiopian female students to outshine male students in the scores of self-esteem, writing attitudes and writing performance in the existing social and cultural situations.

Implications

The results of the present study seem to have invaluable implications for the concerned bodies (e.g. teachers, counselors, policy makers etc). The implications include the need to:

- help students feel valued and motivated for active engagement in the teaching learning process using methods like appropriate task-based activities and learning strategies, which could facilitate the development of students' self-esteem, attitudes and writing skills.
- help students organize a writing club which enhances the development of students' writing skills and related affects, such as self-esteem and attitudes.
- provide female students with gender sensitive counseling services which help them develop self-esteem, positive attitudes, self-confidence. etc.
- design supplementary writing classes, especially for female students.
- conduct further research involving different variables such as students' rural/urban background, private/ government high school background, age, parental income and level of education.

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