
Gender Difference in Writing Self-Efficacy and Performance in Writing: The Case of Adama University Entering Students

Anteneh Tsegaye*

Abstract: The Primary purpose of this study was to find out if there were gender differences in writing self –efficacy and performance in writing among adama university entering students. The largest population was 2004/2005 entries of the University. A sample of 204 students was selected by applying systematic random sampling technique. Out of this, 190 students were considered. Writing self- efficacy scale was employed based on Bandura's (2001)" Guideline for Constructing Self–efficacy Scale". This scale was used as in Pajares and Johnson (1996). Consistent with procedures used by self-efficacy researchers, a teacher made composition test was administered right after the students rated the scale. The composition was rated and scored by two experts using Holistic ESL Composition Profile. The criteria for scoring were the same as those on which students were asked to assess their writing self- efficacy. Strong positive correlation was found between writing self-efficacy and performance in writing. The mean scores revealed that boys were favored for both of the variables.

Introduction

Theoretical Background of the Study

Language teaching and learning are the product of diverse related disciplines. That is why language pedagogy and instructional problems are better understood by referring the contributions and implications of related disciplines to language pedagogy. Second or foreign language learning researchers attempt to investigate the major variables that determine the success or the failure of a language program.

* Lecturer, Institute of Language Studies, Addis Ababa University.

In several of the studies on writing self- efficacy the focus was on "What is the role of self- efficacy in predicting writing performance?" Perceived self-efficacy is usually found to be the strongest or among the strongest predictors of writing competence (Anderman, 1992; Pajares and Valiante, 1999, and Bruning et.al 1987) providing support for Bardura's Social Cognitive Theory regarding the primary role of self-efficacy plays in predicting performance. Most of the studies reported that writing self-efficacy predicted the writing performance of undergraduates. Pajares and Johnson (1994) and Pajares and Valiante (1997) reported that students' confidence in writing skills is related to their competence. Writing self- efficacy of students was related to a holistically scored composition scores. Furthermore, writing self- efficacy of high school students (Pajares and Valiante, 1999) and elementary school students (Pajares, et. al, 1999) were studied. Pajares and his colleagues did bulk of research on writing self- efficacy and influenced the writing ability of students. Several of the studies were done across grade levels, from elementary through university levels.

Gender differences in writing self- efficacy perceptions were not analyzed in the majority of the studies. Pajares and Johnson (1996) found significant differences between male and female students in their writing self-efficacy. Although neither of the studies found significant performance differences in writing composition, both studies found boys rating their self-efficacy to complete the criteria task higher than did the girls. The other study by Pajares and Valiante (1999) found no significant writing self- efficacy differences between boys and girls.

Objectives of the study

Most theories in language teaching in general and the teaching of English as a foreign language in particular have origin in Psychology and better understood by referring learning theories derived from it which is the most influential discipline that entirely affects the success of a language program. Audio-lingual method of teaching, for example, is the product of behaviorism and structural linguistics. The impact of Cognitive Psychology and Mentalist approaches of language acquisition of Piaget and Chomsky brought significant changes on the way people perceive language acquisition and language learning.

In second /foreign language learning, the affective approach of Psychology manifested itself in methods such as Community Language Learning (Curran, 1972) and Suggestopedia (Lozanov, 1979). A strong proponent of Humanism in language teaching Stevick (1980) argues that the success of language learning depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analysis, and more on what goes inside and among the people in the classroom. In this affective filter hypothesis, Krashen (1982) posited the existence of an internal barrier that interfered with second language acquisition when learners were anxious or bored. Shumann (1997) informed by recent developments in cognition research, proposed that psychology determines the extent to which second language is achieved.

Self-efficacy, recent theory in Social Psychology, plays a significant role in language pedagogy since it influences language learning outcomes. Research has shown that performance can be facilitated by the enhancement of self-efficacy: students' judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated type of performance (Bandura, 1986:391). Thus, students' self-efficacy can determine their success of language learning.

The general objectives of the study were to investigate the role of gender and the significances and implications of writing self-efficacy in teaching the writing skill and enhancing students' writing performance. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. *Investigate the relationship between writing self- efficacy and performance in writing.*
2. *Find out if there were gender differences in writing self – efficacy.*
3. *Investigate if there were gender difference in performance in writing.*

Scope of the Study

This study is delimited to Adama University students who joined the university in 2004. The study targeted the regular students who attended the preparatory classes and assigned at this University for teacher education program. The study was confined to the following variables: writing self- efficacy, gender and performance in writing an essay on a given thesis statement. The study attempted to investigate the relationship between writing self-efficacy and performance in writing, and gender differences in the same.

Significance of the Study

The result of the study is significant to ELT teachers and researchers in language pedagogy to be aware of the role of gender and self-efficacy in enhancing students' performance in writing essays or even larger stretch of discourse. It is also significant to students to learn that their belief of their competence in writing can affect their performance. Above all

the result would give feedback to Adama University on the present status of its 'students' writing competence and confidence.

Research Methods

Participants and Data Sources

Participants were 2004 academic year entering students of Adama University (former Nazareth College of Technical Teachers Education). Applying systematic random sampling technique 240 students were selected. Since 50 students gave incomplete answers, they were discarded and only 190 students were considered.

Instruments and Variables

Instruments and variables used in this study have been used by researchers in various investigations of self-efficacy and performance in writing composition (E.g. Pajares et. al 1999; Pajares and Valiante, 1999). Writing self-efficacy scale was made based on Bandura's (2001) Guidelines for Constructing Self-efficacy Scale" and used as in Pajares and Johnson (1996). The scale asked students to rate how sure they could perform specific writing skills from 0 (no chance) to 100 (completely certain). The reliability of the writing self-efficacy scale was 0.95 whereas that of the essay test was found to be 0.92.

Consistent with procedures used in self- efficacy researches (Shell et. al 1989; Pajares and Johnson, 1996), a teacher made composition/ essay writing test was administered. To ensure that students' view their performance on the test was important, they were told that the test accounted as part of their on-going

semester grade. The composition was scored by two experts and the average scores were taken for analysis.

Procedure

Before the actual administration of the instruments, pretest of the instruments was made. Then, writing self-efficacy scale was administered to the sample subjects right after the students completed the scale, an essay writing test on selected thesis statements was given. The students were told that their scores on the test would be considered as part of the progressive tests of Sophomore English.

Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive statistics on each of the variables were calculated. To see the correlation between the variables and to analyze and discuss the relation between the variables. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used T- test was used to find out if there were gender differences between the variables.

Results and Discussion

Correlation between Writing Self-efficacy and Performance in Writing

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of writing self-efficacy and performance in writing. This is followed by Table 2 that shows the correlation between these two variables.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of WSE and PW

	N	Mean	SD
WSE	190	60.00	14.40
PW	190	60.36	15.04

The Mean values of writing self-efficacy and performance in writing were 60.00 and 60.36 respectively. The Mean scores of students' writing self-efficacy and performance in writing were similar. The standard deviations of each of the variables were almost similar. From this it can be said that students' perception of their ability and their real performance in writing an essay were similar.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Between WSE and PW

	WSE	PW
WSE	1	0.37**
N		190
PW	0.37**	1
N	190	190

** indicates result of the significance level $df= 187$; $P < 0.01$

Writing self-efficacy and performance in writing indicated significant relations. This means that students who rated their self-efficacy high obtained higher scores on the test of writing than those who rated low. This finding is consistent with researches on self-efficacy beliefs and performance in essay writing as strongly related variables (E.g. Shell et. al, 1989; Pajares and Valiante, 1997, Pajares and Johnson, 1994).

To sum up, strong correlation between these two variables means influencing one we can positively influence the other. If

we help students to develop stronger writing self-efficacy, we are helping them to improve their performance or ability in writing since students with high self-efficacy exert more attention, effort, persistence and strategies.

Gender Differences in Writing Self-efficacy

Table 3 below presents the group statistics of the variable under study. The results prove that boys scored higher means than girls. The standard deviations from the mean for boys and girls were found to be 12.89 and 13.37 respectively.

Table 3: Group Statistics

Variable	Boys(N=136)		Girls(N= 53)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Writing self-efficacy	63.84	12.89	49.94	13.37

To see if there were significant statistical gender differences in writing self-efficacy, independent t-test was calculated. Table 4 revealed that boys and girls showed significant statistical differences in writing self-efficacy in favor of boys. This result is consistent with Pajares and Johnson (1996) who found significant gender differences in writing self-efficacy between male and female students in writing self-efficacy. It is against Pajares and Valiante (1999) that found no significant writing self-efficacy differences between boys and girls.

Table 4: T-test Table of Gender Differences in Writing Self-efficacy

Variable	T-test	df	P Value
Writing self-efficacy	6.59	187	P<0.01

Gender Differences in Performance in Writing

Results of descriptive statistics for the groups which indicate the means and the standard deviations are presented in Table 5. As shown in the table boys scored higher means than girls in their performance of writing an essay on a given thesis statement.

Table 4: Group Statistics

Variable	Boys (N=136)		Girls (N=53)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Performance in Writing	63.60	14.11	51.98	14.37

The significance of gender difference in writing performance was also calculated using Independent T-test. As it is presented in Table 7 below significant performance difference between boys and girls was found in favoring boys. This is in contrary to researchers that presented no statistical difference between boys and girls in their performance in writing (E.g. Pajares and Johnson, 1996).

Table 5: T-test Table of Gender Differences in Performance in Writing

Variable	T-test	df	P Value
Performance in writing	5.06	187	P<0.01

Summary and Conclusions

The general purpose of the study was to find out the contributions of self-efficacy and the role of gender in teaching the writing skill. Writing self-efficacy, gender and performance in writing were taken as the major variable of the study. 190 first year students of Adama The subjects of the study were 190 first year students of Adama University. They did properly rated the self-efficacy scale and did the essay writing task successfully.

The Mean values of writing self-efficacy and performance in writing (60.00 and 60.35 respectively) were almost similar and fairly above average (50%). This means students scored just above the average through the holistic scoring profile and hence need additional remedial classes or language improvement classes so as to upgrade the their command of the English language in general and the writing skill in particular. Pearson Correlation (r) showed significant positive correlation between the variables. This is to say that writing self-efficacy of students should be enhanced so as to influence the performance of students in writing. Language instructors need to influence students' efficacy in the language skill in so doing they will be in a position to improve the writing competence of their students.

On the other hand, the place of gender in writing self-efficacy and performance in writing were studied. Boys were favored for both of the variables as the t-test calculated revealed. Boys rated their belief of their competence (self-efficacy) higher than girls and at the same time it was found that boys scored higher grades than girls in their writing test. These significance differences in gender across the variables warn that special self-efficacy training should be given to girls in addition to remedial classes.

To sum up, ELT teachers, specialists and researchers in the area need to know the significance of self-efficacy in influencing the language performance of students. Self-efficacy training should be the part of ELT syllabus and instructional process since it influences language learning outcomes. On the other hand, special remedial classes and self-efficacy training should be arranged for girls attending writing classes in colleges or universities. Further research should be done in the area of gender and language self-efficacy.

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