

Relationship Between Writing Self-Efficacy and Writing Attitude in Lebanese Elementary Schools

Najla Mazeh^{1,2*} Dalal Moukarzel²

1.Department of Public Health, Lebanese University, Beirut, Lebanon

2.Department of Educational Sciences, Saint-Joseph University, Beirut, Lebanon

Abstract

This mixed method design study investigated the relationship between self-efficacy in writing and attitude towards English writing in grade 6 in three private schools in Lebanon. It also explored teachers' perceptions of their students' strategic behavior and motivation (self-efficacy and attitude). The study involved 161 students who completed two rating scales that measured self-efficacy for writing and attitude towards English writing. In addition, six teachers were interviewed to explore their beliefs about students' motivational state. The results indicated a significant positive correlation between self-efficacy and attitude towards writing. Students' self-reports of perceived self-efficacy and attitude towards writing were high and positive unlike the low teachers' perceptions towards their students' performance. These findings supported the need to raise teachers' awareness towards the motivational factors as a mean to promote writing proficiency and embed these in the curriculum.

Keywords: Self-efficacy beliefs, Attitude, ESL writing, Elementary level

1. Introduction

Writing is a lifelong competency that is critical to students' success in academic, vocational context, and work place (Baker *et al.* 2009). Despite its prevalence in everyday life, many students are not exhibiting proficient writing skills (Graham *et al.* 2015).

Writing is considered as a complex cognitive and social process that depends on self-regulation and motivation (Hidi & Boscolo 2006). Self-efficacy beliefs and attitude for writing influence academic achievement and are considered as critical factors that determine quality of writing (Bandura 1997; Harris & Graham 1996). However, despite the interrelation of these factors, there have been variations in findings on how these are developed across school years according to domain, situation, task, and learners. Hence determining what affects self-efficacy in writing became a major claim (Bruning & Kaufman 2016).

Comparing studies in the west with others in the Middle East, Lebanon can be taken as a reference. It is considered a multilingual country, where in addition to Arabic, the native language, students in schools learn English or French as a primary foreign language, and are also required to learn a second foreign language (Esseili 2016; Bacha & Bahous 2013). Bacha (2002) indicated that the lack of students' motivation to write hindered their writing proficiency. Years later, Esseili (2016) found out that teaching and learning writing is a challenging aspect for both teachers and students in Lebanese schools and universities, and recommended further research on second language writing and students' performance.

2. Literature Review

There has been an increased interest in the role of motivation in writing. In relation to second language acquisition, multiple theoretical perspectives including the social cognitive theory have maintained that one's perception of abilities and performance are considered critical factors of motivation (Mercer & Williams 2014).

Hayes (1996) and Pajares (2003) emphasized the essential role of the learners' beliefs and attitude in the writing process in relation to progress and success. Research showed that writers with higher efficacy beliefs have greater writing achievement than their peers (Pajares & Johnson 1994). Proficient and effective writing requires self-regulation, strategies, skills, attitude, and self-efficacy beliefs. Students who struggle in writing are found to lack many of such components. They perceive writing as an act of retrieving knowledge about a topic, rather than focusing on choice of topic, text organization, and goals. Furthermore, research indicated a reciprocal relation between task difficulty and motivation. When students experience difficulty in writing, fear of failure, self-doubts, negative attitude, and low productivity may increase (Harris *et al.* 1997).

Findings from other recent studies continue to demonstrate the relationship between positive writing attitudes and writing success (Graham *et al.* 2007; Zumbrunn *et al.* 2010).

Theoretically, attitude influence writing ability through its impact on factors, such as cognitive engagement. Students with a more positive attitude exert more effort and write more than students with a less positive attitude (Graham *et al.* 2007); and according to Zumbrunn (2010) are satisfied with their performance thus, tend to have high level of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy beliefs are directly affected by various factors as task mastery, social persuasion, affective and emotional state.

In the United States of America, several studies showed that students' writing attitudes influence writing self-efficacy. Graham *et al.* (2007) examined the writing attitudes and writing achievement of elementary

students and found that students with more positive writing attitudes had greater writing achievement than their peers with less favorable attitudes.

In a study highlighting the positive relationship between students' writing attitudes and writing self-efficacy beliefs, Zumbrunn et al. 2010 observed a positive significant relationship between elementary students' writing attitudes and self-efficacy. The findings indicated that writing attitudes can influence students' perceptions of competence and subsequent achievement.

Research indicated that students' with high writing efficacy beliefs tend to enjoy and value writing, exert more effort into writing tasks, persist longer with difficult tasks, and write more. In this regard, teachers' role is highly important in attending to students' self-efficacy and attitude towards writing to promote language proficiency (Pajares *et al.* 2000; Hoy & Spero 2005) especially in the context of second language learning where writing proficiency is considered a basis for self-efficacy (Bruning & Kaufman 2016).

In Turkey, a correlational study on primary fourth grade students examined the relation between writing attitude and self-efficacy beliefs, and the effect of these variables on summarization in writing. Results indicated a high correlation between these two variables (Bulut 2017).

In the Lebanese context, studies on the relation of self-efficacy and attitude towards writing, students' and teachers' perception regarding these variables are very limited, especially at the elementary level.

Nazzal (2008) investigated the relationship between second language writing apprehension, writing self-efficacy beliefs, and writing performance among university students enrolled in communication skills courses. Results from surveys indicated a negative correlation between second language writing apprehension and self-efficacy beliefs; and a weak positive correlation between self-efficacy beliefs and writing performance. Findings from interviews revealed that teacher' writing practices, feedback, and topics given affected students' writing self-efficacy beliefs and their attitude towards English writing skills.

Another study by Bacha and Bahous (2008) explored the perceptions of university business students' and faculty members about students' writing proficiency, and concluded that both groups agreed on the importance of writing and on the need to promote students' writing skills. However, there was a difference in perceptions towards students' writing proficiency, as the latter rated their performance level higher than what their instructors did.

According to Awada and Diab (2016), studies conducted in Lebanon revealed that the pedagogical and learning approaches and strategies stated in the English Language curriculum were neglected. Due to the importance of these areas in second language writing, investigation of students' self-efficacy and attitude towards writing along with teachers' perception of their students' proficiency is required in the Lebanese context.

3. Purpose

This study aimed at exploring the relation between students' self-efficacy and attitude towards English writing at Lebanese schools, and how teachers perceived their students' performance.

4. Research Questions and Hypotheses

Two main research questions were behind our study:

1. To what extent is there a relationship between elementary students' self-efficacy and attitude towards writing in grade 6?
2. What are English teachers' perceptions of students' performance in writing, their self-efficacy and attitude?

It was hypothesized that there was a positive relation between students' writing attitudes and self-efficacy.

5. Method

5.1 Participants

The study was conducted in three purposefully selected private schools (School A, B, and C) in Mount Lebanon where English is taught as a second language. A total of six ESL teachers (two from each school) were interviewed and 161 students, whose native language is Arabic, were randomly selected from grade 6.

5.2 Instrument

Three instruments were used in the study: (a) self-efficacy for writing rating scale, (b) attitude towards writing rating scale, and (c) a semi-structured teacher interview. Validity and reliability of the first two instruments were obtained in previous studies (Graham *et al.* 2017; Wijekumar *et al.* 2018) and were ascertained in the Lebanese context. Authorization to use and adapt the instruments was formally obtained from Graham and Harris.

5.2.1 The Self-efficacy for Writing Rating scale

It was administered to measure students' perceived confidence in writing. The following items were included in the scale: (1) I can quickly think of the perfect word when writing; (2) I can think of many ideas when writing;

(3) I can think of a lot of original ideas when writing; (4) I know exactly where to place my ideas in my writing; (5) I can put my ideas into writing; (6) I can avoid distractions while I write; (7) I can start writing assignments quickly; (8) I know when and where to use writing strategies; (9) I can keep writing even when it is difficult; (10) I can think of my writing goals before I write. Students rated their confidence for each task using a 100-point Likert scale type; scores ranged from 0 (no chance) to 100 (completely certain). Thus, a minimum score could be zero and a maximum could reach 1000 over 1000. This grading format was recommended in Pajares (2003) due to its predictive utility of students' competence.

5.2.2 *The Attitude towards Writing Rating Scale*

It measured students' attitude towards writing. It consisted of 5 items: I enjoy writing; Writing is fun; I like to write at school; I like to write at home; Writing is a good way to spend my time. Students used a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to express their agreement with these items. The minimum score could be 5 and the maximum 25 over 25.

5.2.3 *A semi-structured interview*

It was conducted to explore teachers' perceptions of their students' writing self-efficacy and attitude towards writing. It consisted of six questions.

6. Procedure

In accordance with the ethical consideration and prior to implementation, approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Center of Ethics at Saint-Joseph University of Beirut. A pilot study was then conducted to ensure instruments' content validity. In addition, informed consent to participate in the study was also ensured from school, parents and students. The researchers respected participants' anonymity and confidentiality of information throughout the study.

The students participating in the study were asked to fill the self-efficacy and attitude rating scale in 20 minutes in their classrooms. Instructions were read loudly and a model of few items was provided before students started to fill the scales. Two Teachers from each school, A, B, and C, were interviewed individually for 10 minutes in a calm meeting office in school. The interviews were audio-taped to ensure accuracy and verbatim responses.

7. Design

The present study adopted a convergent parallel mixed method design that allowed the combination of both quantitative and qualitative research to provide a comprehensive analysis of the problem (Creswell 2014). The different instruments used and the existing literature review insured the triangulation aspect.

8. Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics including mean, standard deviation, and Spearman correlation were obtained using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.

Teachers' interviews were transcribed; common responses were compared and categorized. Emerging themes were identified after clustering ideas together.

Results from quantitative and qualitative data were examined in light of previous studies to shed light on the relation between writing self-efficacy beliefs and attitude toward writing and to determine consistency or variation among research findings in the Lebanese context.

9. Results

9.1 *Reliability of the Instruments*

Cronbach's Alpha was used to reveal the internal consistency of the self-efficacy for writing and the attitude for writing rating scales (Table 1). We found that both scales had a good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha coefficient reported of (.89) on writing Self efficacy, and (.79) on attitude for writing.

Table 1. The Cronbach's Alpha for Writing Self-efficacy and Attitude for writing measures

	<i>N</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>N of items</i>
Self-efficacy for Writing	161	.89	10
Attitude for Writing	161	.79	5

9.2 *Results from the Students' Survey*

9.2.1 *Descriptive statistics*

Scores for the 161 students' self-efficacy for writing and attitude towards rating scales were calculated by adding the numeric response on items in each rating scale. The results showed high mean scores on both rating scales, respectively ($M = 694.1$; $SD = 195.04$), and ($M = 19.5$; $SD = 4.60$) indicating high level of confidence in students' own perception of writing proficiency and positive attitude towards writing (Table 2).

Table 2. Mean scores on self-efficacy for writing and attitude towards writing rating scales

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Self-Efficacy for writing	161	694.1	195.04
Attitude towards writing	161	19.5	4.60

9.2.2 Inferential statistics

Spearman correlation was calculated to explore the relationship between scores on writing self-efficacy and attitude for writing scales. Results indicated a significant positive correlation ($\rho=0.537$; sig. <0.01), in the expected direction, with self-efficacy and attitude for writing, showing that as self-efficacy increased, so did the positive attitude towards writing (Table 3).

Table 3. Spearman's rho correlation of Writing Self-Efficacy Scale with Attitude for Writing Scale

		Attitude towards writing		Self-Efficacy for writing	
Spearman's rho	Attitude towards writing	Correlation Coefficient	1.000		.537**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.		.000
		N	161		161
	Self-Efficacy for writing	Correlation Coefficient	.537**		1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.
		N	161		161

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

9.3 Results from teachers' interviews

The following three themes emerged from teachers' interviews: (a) teachers' views of students' writing performance and their attitude, (b) factors affecting students' writing performance, and (c) teachers' role in improving students' writing proficiency.

9.3.1 Teachers' views of students' writing performance and their attitude

During the individual interviews, teachers in the 3 schools revealed that students were weak in writing, and their writing abilities were not up to the expected level in comparison to other areas such as speaking and reading in English. Teacher two (T2) in school B added that "students don't try to apply rules acquired in grammar into their writing" implying limited competence in syntax use. Teachers also stated that students were not confident in their writing abilities because they lacked vocabulary, ideas, strategies, and goals of writing. On the other hand, teachers assured that students perceived writing to be difficult, boring, and not entertaining; thus, that they ended up not enjoying writing tasks. This was best expressed by teacher one (T1) in School (A) who said "students feel that writing is a heavy burden", while teacher two (T2) in School (C) commented that "students perceive writing chores as punishment" indicating that they disliked writing and had a negative attitude towards writing.

9.3.2 Factors affecting students' writing performance

Interestingly, all teachers in the three schools focused in their answers on students' deficiencies in writing. They mentioned that they lacked essential elements reflected in the limited vocabulary repertoire, which decreased their ability to fluently express ideas or use original ones, as well as to organize their compositions in a coherent manner. Teacher two (T2) from school A and teacher (T2) from school C pointed out that their students were unable to use writing strategies and encountered difficulty in the structure and organization of ideas.

In the three schools, all teachers explained that students could not set goals and were not putting effort while writing. They also indicated that during writing sessions, students were frequently reminded to stay on task. Teacher two (T2) in school B said "students do their writing carelessly, and don't put effort and time in writing", which showed a lack in elements related to self-regulation in the writing process.

On the other hand, in an attempt to explain students' limited writing proficiency, the six teachers considered that students needed adequate exposure to writing practices especially, as they said, "at home". In addition, they considered that students' writing products were usually short and lacked meaning because "students have limited content knowledge and find difficulty to express their ideas" as teacher one (T1) in school C mentioned.

9.3.3 Teachers' role in promoting students' writing proficiency

Teachers considered their role in promoting writing proficiency under three main points: attending to individual differences, providing extensive writing activities and reading. All the interviewed teachers considered writing to be a complex process, and that they exerted much effort to encourage students to write. Teacher one (T1) in school B revealed that "to involve students in the process, I provide them with individual support to promote their level in writing". Furthermore, teachers ascertained that they give students different writing models and practices in an attempt to improve their skills. They also said that they encourage their students to read stories at

home and in class in order to gain more information about different topics and use these in their writing.

10. Discussion

Quantitative results obtained from students' writing self-efficacy scale and writing attitude provided confirmation of previous research findings from Zumbrunn et. al. (2010) and Bulut (2017) concerning the positive correlation between perceived high level of self-efficacy and positive attitude towards writing among elementary students. Thus, these two positively correlated variables can be considered essential for promoting writing proficiency (Harris & Graham 1996; Hayes 1996; and Pajares 2003). However, this finding was not commensurate with qualitative data from Elementary teachers' interviews that explored perceptions of their students' writing self-efficacy and attitude towards writing. While students' estimates were high, teachers' perceptions were low and negative. These findings were similar to those from Bacha and Bahous (2008; 2011) who did their study at the university level, which could raise questions about the English language acquisition in Lebanon from elementary school to higher education. Hence, our results corroborated with those of other researchers in the West (Harris *et al.* 1997; Bruning & Kaufman 2016, Graham *et al.* 2017) in regard to raising teachers' awareness towards the motivational factors as a mean to promote writing proficiency and embed these in the curriculum.

11. Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study was an attempt to explore writing self-efficacy and attitude from the perspective of elementary students and their teachers. Results indicated high and positive levels of students' perceptions towards their self-efficacy in writing, while teachers perceived their students' performance and motivational levels to be low.

Our findings were however limited to purposefully selected samples of schools, teachers, and students, which could not be a factor of generalization. Nevertheless, the data collected were enough to explore potential solutions for further research studies such as examining the effects of a writing model that could ensure a positive learning environment, enhance students' performance and boost positive attitudes for both students and teachers towards writing across grade levels.

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About Authors

Najla Mazeh, is an instructor at the Lebanese University/faculty of Public Health since 2008. She teaches courses related to the field of cognitive psychology, theories of intelligence, special education and assessment in special education. She is the founder and director of a private center, devoted to educational measurement & intervention of students with learning difficulties. She received her Teaching Diploma in special education in 1998 and her Master's degree in educational psychology with emphasis on test and measurement in 2007 from the American University of Beirut. Her specialization is in cognition, learning, assessment and development. She is currently working on a PhD in educational sciences at Saint-Joseph University of Beirut.

Dr. Dalal Moukarzel graduated from the University of Mulhouse, France in 2011 with a PhD in educational sciences, and from the American University of Beirut with a Master's degree in educational administration and policy studies. She has an extensive experience in Lebanon and the Arabian Gulf region as Head of Elementary schools and Director of faculty and instructional development. She is currently an Associate Professor and the Consultant to the Vice President for Academic Affairs at Saint-Joseph University of Beirut. Her research interests include teaching and learning, assessment and quality assurance, and faculty development.