

High achievers versus low achievers education essay



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It is beyond doubt that writing is the most complicated skill for second language learners to master. Translating ideas into readable text is highly complex process. Second language learners in order to write intelligibly have to simultaneously pay attention to higher level skills of planning and organizing as well as lower level skills of spelling, punctuation, word choice, and so on (Richards and Renandya, 2002). Accomplishment of this mission demands a proper level of proficiency and belief in one's own capabilities.

According to Hummann (2005), transition between functioning as student writers and future teachers who will be responsible for writing instruction in their classrooms is problematic. Teaching writing requires high level of writing skills and self beliefs. The beliefs that students develop about their academic capabilities play a crucial role in their academic and career success. (Pajares and Valiante, 1999). Unrealistic beliefs lead to underachievement.

Underachievement is commonly defined as a incongruity between potential (or ability) and performance (or achievement) (Reis and McCoach, 2000).

Thus, an underachiever can be defined as a person who seems to have the capability of being successful in academic education but is nevertheless struggling . According to Bandura, " If self-efficacy is lacking, people tend to behave ineffectually, even though they know what to do" (1986, p. 425).

Factors which are commonly related to underachievement comprise low academic self-concept (Schunk, 1998; Supplee, 1990; Whitmore, 1980), low self-motivation (Weiner, 1992) and low goal-valuation (McCall, Evahn, and Kratzer, 1992), low self-efficacy (Schunk, 1998). The review of the related literature suggests that underachievers commonly tend to be characterized

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with attributes of lower academic self-perceptions, inferior self-motivation and subordinate self-regulation and less objective oriented, behaviour, and more pessimistic attitudes toward the educational system in comparison with high achievers (Reis and McCoach, 2000). Nevertheless, the preponderance of research scrutinizing the common features of underachieving students has exploited qualitative, clinical, or single subject research methodology. A small number of all-encompassing quantitative studies have inspected the validity and truth value of these hypotheses (Reis and McCoach, 2000).

According to Pajares and Valiante (1999):

It is due to the potent nature of self-beliefs that academic attainments can differ markedly when students have similar ability. Believing that they are capable serves students well when attempting academic tasks because such confidence helps to sustain effort, increase perseverance and resiliency when obstacles are encountered, foster optimism, and lower feelings of apprehension as academic tasks are engaged. As a result, positive self-beliefs maximize the level of success students ultimately achieve (p. 390).

The affective factors that have significant functions in engendering overall writing self-beliefs comprise the confidence with which students verge on writing tasks, the writing consternation and anxiety that students experience as they attempt writing tasks, how helpful they recognize writing to be, the self-monitoring strategies they employ, and the perceptions of self-worth which are allied with writing. (Elbow, 1993; Hull and Rose, 1989).

Considering the fact that the majority of the subjects in this investigation are teachers and prospective teachers, it is remarkable that while teaching

effectiveness is decisive to teaching performance, knowing about teachers' self beliefs for fruitfully engaging and dealing with professional and academic tasks that are straightforwardly interconnected to instruction, such as writing is also important. Self confidence in one's own task competence, in addition to actual skill, is of crucial importance in teaching effectiveness (Wilson and Floden, 2003). Hence this preliminary research is devised to compare high achieving and low achieving TEFL (teaching English as foreign language) students' beliefs about their writings. s

To assess the subjects' writing self-beliefs, one survey with multiple components was administered to measure students' English writing self-efficacy, writing anxiety in English, writing self-concept in English, self-efficacy for self-regulation in English writing and perceived value of writing in English. Subjects responded to all instruments on a 10-point scale from 0 (not sure at all) to 100 (completely sure) like the conventional Likert scale format. Pajares, Hartley, and Valiante (2001) came to the conclusion that a writing self-efficacy scale having a 0 to 100 response format was more reliable in term of psychometric properties than one which had a traditional Likert format.

'Writing self-efficacy in English' items required subjects to appraise how confident they were in their ability to write in English. The instrument employed in the study was the adapted form of Mills, Pajares, and Herron's (2006) foreign language self-efficacy scale in reading and listening. To ensure of the face validity of the scale, it was reviewed by two experts whose fields of interests were close to academic self-efficacy research. The scale included 25 items which aimed at tapping the students' writing self-

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efficacy in the areas of expression (8 items), grammar (6 items), organization (4 items), and content (7 items). Questions on the self-efficacy instrument asked students, "how sure are you that you can perform each of the English writing skills below?"

The results obtained from the English writing self-efficacy instrument were analyzed by the investigator. The psychometric properties of the instrument were examined for internal consistency. A similar instrument used by Mills, Pajares, and Herron (2006) had shown a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .97 and .95 respectively for a similar instrument which measured reading and listening self-efficacy. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of Mills' and Péron's (2008) French writing self-efficacy turned out to be .97. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the present study was .91 for overall self efficiency, .90 for expression, .79 for grammar, .84 for organization and .88 for content.

'Writing anxiety in English' was assessed by an adapted form of Betz's (1978) Mathematics Anxiety Scale (MAS). Each of the anxiety items was modified to fit the writing domain, which totaled to 9 items. An example writing anxiety question in English was "writing in English makes me feel uneasy and confused." Students answered to questions about feelings of tension and apprehension connected with writing in English. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the present study was .90.

A modified form of Marsh's (1990) Academic Self Description Questionnaire (ASDQ-1) was employed to measure 'Writing self-concept in English'. The writing self-concept in English instrument was composed of 7 items as well as broad-viewed self-perceptions of English writing ability. A sample item

which tapped English writing self-concept is " Compared to others in my class I am a good English writer." The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the writing self-concept in English instrument for the present study was calculated to be . 91.

One's perceived competence in utilizing the apposite strategies to map, screen, and complete a writing task (Bandura, 1997), or 'Self-efficacy for self-regulation in English writing', was measured by a modified subscale from Bandura's (1995) Children's Multidimensional Self-Efficacy Scales. To measure the learners' perceptions of ability in employing different self-regulated learning strategies, 7 of the 11 original items were utilized in the present study(example question : " How well can you finish your English compositions on time?" Learners provided answers to questions that self-appraise their competence to complete and focus on English writing assignments. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the instrument which was employed in the present study was . 88.

'Perceived value of English writing' was assessed by a modified scale from Eccles' (1984) Student Attitude Questionnaire and estimated learners' interest, satisfaction, and perceived value of writing in English. To assess the learners' perceptions of the value of writing in English 11 items were utilized. " I enjoy learning about different English writing techniques" is a sample item from among the ones which was employed to estimate perceived value of writing in English. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the perceived value of writing in English instrument in the present study was . 87.

4. 4. Procedure

In spring of 2009, the survey evaluating the students' writing self-beliefs was administered to TEFL students of Payame Noor University. Administering of the survey on writing self-beliefs took place during tutorial period. The instructors were asked to leave the classes during the administration of the tests to promote subjects' sincerity and candor in answering the attitudinal questions. The investigator read aloud the written instructions for each subscale and encouraged the subjects to ask questions if they did not understand them.

Teaching English as foreign language learners were divided to high achievers and low achievers base on their performance on their Advance Writing course in 0 to 20 interval scale. The subjects who failed Advance Writing course (below 12) were assigned to the low achievers group and subjects who passed this course with acceptable scores (above 14) were assigned to high achievers group. In this study writing scores ranged from 8 to 18. To achieve a comprehensive judgment of students' overall writing ability, the scores in this course were the average of three in-class compositions and three homework compositions (8 points) plus final examination compositions (12 point). The evaluation criteria were based on the TOEFL writing assessment checklist. See appendix B for samples of class and exam composition topics.

4. 5. Data Analyses

To determine the difference of the writing self-beliefs of high and low achieving writers studying teaching English as foreign language, two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. In this two way analysis <https://assignbuster.com/high-achievers-versus-low-achievers-education-essay/>

design, subjects' writing self-beliefs were assessed on two instances, whether they were high achievers or low achievers. The purpose was to evaluate whether there was significant difference between the mean writing self-beliefs scores of high achievers and low achievers. A two-way ANOVA was conducted with high and low achieving groups as independent variable. The analysis included the subcomponents of writing self-efficacy (i. e., writing self-efficacy for grammar, content, expression, and organization) as second independent variable. Each of the four scales' had two levels (high achievers and low achievers).

A second two-way ANOVA was also conducted with two groups as independent variable. The analysis included writing anxiety, perceived value of writing, writing self-concept, and self-efficacy for self-regulation. Each of the four scales had two levels (high achievers and low achievers).

5. Results

5. 1. Research Question 1

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there was any difference between high and low achievement subjects in writing course and writing self-efficacy beliefs (See Table 2). The basic assumptions for using two-way ANOVA were met. The first independent variable was achievement in Advance Writing course and included two levels (high achievers and low achievers). The second independent variable included four levels, the subcomponents of writing self-efficacy in content, grammar, organization, and expression.

The results of the two-way ANOVA indicated a significant difference between the high and low achievement groups in the writing self-efficacy variables, Critical Values for the Tukey HSD (2)(0.01) = 4.8, $F(1) = 122.9$, $p < .0001$. Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 2. The results indicated that the writing self-efficacy scores of the high achievers were significantly greater than writing self-efficacy scores of the low achievers. These results suggested that the high achieving writers' beliefs in their ability to effectively use grammar, communicate content, write with appropriate choice and variety of vocabulary and sentence structures, and write in an organized fashion were significantly higher than the low achievers. There were no significant differences between subcomponents of writing self efficiency.

The major objective of this study was to determine whether writing self beliefs of high and low achievers TEFL were different. The results suggest that there is a significant difference between high and low achievers writing self beliefs construct (or global writing self belief), measured in areas of writing self efficiency, writing self-concept, writing anxiety, self-efficacy for self-regulation in writing and perceived value in writing. These findings support the tenets of social cognitive theory regarding the influence of academic self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997), and confirm the previous findings (e. g., Pajares et al., in press; Pajares and Valiante, 1997; Shell et al., 1989, 1995), and extend the generalizability domain of these findings to EFL learners as well.

Enhancing the learners' self-efficacy beliefs might positively affect their writing capabilities, which in turn might lead to more efficiency in the process of second language learning and academic achievement as well.

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In order to upgrade writing self beliefs of the learners researchers have emphasized on the creation of authentic writing milieus and learning activities that interest and appeals to students (Bruning and Horn, 2000; Campbell, 1998; Walker, 2003), to encourage learners to read each other's writing (Pajares, 2003), to give learners freedom of choice and tenure opportunities (Spaulding, 1995; Walker, 2003), to encourage collaborative writing and discussions (Walker, 2003), to provide chances for learners to write unswervingly in different styles (McConochie, 2000; Wachholz and Etheridge, 1996), and to allow learners to invigilate and ponder upon their evolvment (Collins and Bissell, 2002).

Although Klassen (2002) analyzed 16 research studies which examined the writing self-efficacy beliefs of 6th to 10th grade students and found that low achievers over-estimate their ability to complete specific writing tasks, the results of this study suggest that students at higher level education have realistic beliefs about their own abilities.

However, it is worthy of notice to emphasize that any implications and applications of the findings of the study should be interpreted taking into account the following limitations and the specific context of this study. Efficacy beliefs are context-specific self-appraisals of the potential to successfully do a task. They are acquired through mastery experiences, observation of others, social/verbal persuasion, and interpretations of physiological and emotional states (Bandura, 1995). This study was conducted in a distance education university in Iran. This particular setting imposed some unique characteristics to the study. Like many distance and

open educational programs students could choose to self-study materials and not to participate in tutorial sessions.

Unfortunately, the openness of the university made access to some subjects impossible and limited the sample. As a matter of fact most of the TEFL majors were female and therefore could not be considered an adequately representative sample of the target population; it was impractical to balance sex to control for its possible effects.

Due to the broad-spectrum apathy of the subjects to answering any kind of questionnaire, almost half of the students refused to answer the questionnaires and were inevitably eliminated from the study. To make up for this limitation, the study defined wider ranges of scores in the operational definition of the high or low achievers variables.

Finally, the present study was a step toward understanding learners' beliefs about their writing competence and their actual performance in academic contexts. Further research is needed to address how it is that writing beliefs impact learning the writing skill. Moreover, further research is needed to investigate what happens if the self beliefs perceptions of the learners are deliberately augmented; will the manipulation of the self beliefs result in better performance of the subjects in writing tasks? Or is it a one-way route from writing ability to the perceptions of self efficacy?