

## **Sources of Efficacy, Efficacy, Gender and Performance in the Writing Skills of Government and Private School Students: A Comparative Study**

Dawit Amogne Assegdew\*

**Abstract:** The study attempted to investigate the correlation among Sources of Efficacy, Efficacy, Gender and Performance in the Writing Skills of Government and Private School Students in Bahir Dar town. During the study, 138 students (47 from Bahir Dar Academy and 91 from Bahir Dar Preparatory School) of grade 11 were studied. Data were gathered through questionnaires and a test. Three statistical techniques (correlation, t-test and regression) were employed to analyze the data. Accordingly, the correlation between writing efficacy and the corresponding performance of students (whole sample) was found to be a significant one. One compared to the other, private school students significantly surpassed government school students in both writing efficacy and writing performance. The results also indicated that females in the government school had debilitated capability beliefs. Their performance in the writing test, however, was not excelled significantly by males in the school. Males and females in the private school had more or less similar levels of writing efficacy and performance. With regard to sources of self efficacy (Mastery Experience, Vicarious Experience, Social Persuasions, and Physiological States), it was found out that these sources collectively predicted the writing efficacy of the whole sample. When others controlled, Vicarious Experience and Social persuasions each had a non-significant positive influence on students' writing self efficacy whereas Mastery Experience had a significant positive influence on the writing efficacy of the whole sample. It was seen in the study that private school students were highly dependent on their Mastery Experience for building up their writing efficacy while this variable had a positive, but non-significant, influence on the writing efficacy of government school students. On the other hand, Physiological States had a significant negative impact on the writing efficacy of students in both schools. I, thus, recommend that parents, teachers, schools and other bodies concerned should be in the lead to help students develop their efficacy beliefs as these students' progress through school.

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\* Lecturer, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Bahir Dar University; E-mail: [dawitamogne@yahoo.com](mailto:dawitamogne@yahoo.com).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The ability to communicate in English is one of the requirements in the academic world in Ethiopia where the language is used as a medium of instruction in secondary and tertiary levels of education. I, as a teacher of English as a foreign language, hear that the English language proficiency of students at almost all levels is deteriorating. Girma (2005), for instance, states that regardless of efforts made so far, students' English language proficiency in Ethiopia is found to be very low. In the same vein, Alamirew (2005) found various students in different educational levels lacking the English needed to accomplish their academic tasks. Furthermore, I usually find the academic writings of my own students below my expectation.

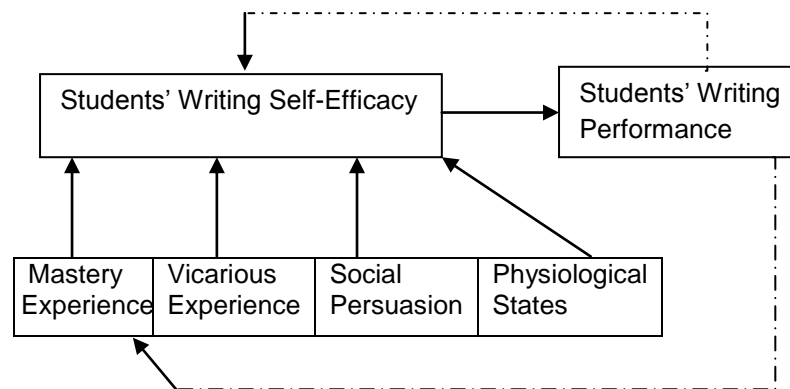
As Williams and Burden (1997) and Harmer (2001) point out, the academic failure of students may be attributed to various social and/or personal factors. For example, students' English as A Foreign Language (EFL) proficiency might be attributed to factors such as motivation (Mulugeta, 1996), anxiety (Abate, 1996) and efficacy belief (Millis, et al., 2007; Yalew, 1997). Efficacy is central to social learning theory. Students supported with efficacy sources are confident in their academic capabilities. They regulate their tasks and perform better in the academic area than those whose capability beliefs are debilitated. With regard to this, Bandura (1995, 1997, 2006) theorizes that the beliefs individuals possess about their own capabilities to perform tasks successfully can potentially determine their ultimate success in their academic tasks.

Although some studies indicate the existence of stronger positive correlation of the two variables in Mathematics (Pajares, 1996a; Yalew, 1997), relatively positive relationships were also found in writing (McCarthy, Meier and Rinderer, 1985; Pajares, Johnson and Usher, 2007; Anteneh, 2004) and reading (Shell, Murphy and Bruning, 1989). Bandura (1977a, 1977b, 1982, 1995, and 2006) proposes four major sources which may build up the self-efficacy of students. These sources are mastery experience (students' own interpretation of their own previous performances), vicarious experience

(observation of others), social persuasion (feedbacks and encouragements students receive from others) and physiological states (emotional reactions such as arousal, anxiety, stress, and fatigue).

Not many studies have been conducted on the sources of efficacy in school settings (Usher and Pajares, 2008). Not much has also been done in Ethiopia in this regard. In particular, it is not easy to find related research work in the area of teaching English as a foreign language in government and private school settings. Thus, it is worth researching the effect of such psychological constructs on the performance of students. This study, therefore, aimed at investigating the kind and strength of relationship between private and government school students' self-efficacy beliefs and their EFL writing performance. An attempt has also been made to assess the influence of sources on students' writing self-efficacy.

### The Conceptual Framework of the Research Problem



—→ Indicate relationships under investigation

----→ Indicate relationships, but not under investigation

## **Objectives**

The research aimed at:

- assessing if there exists a significant difference related to sources of writing efficacy, writing efficacy and writing performance between private and government school students;
- identifying the kind and strength of relationships among efficacy sources, self-efficacy and performance in the writing skills of the two groups; and
- identifying the place of gender in the variables' interaction.

## **Significance of the Study**

Different parties may benefit from this study. The present research can, for instance, provide teachers, counselors, and administrators with important insights into students' academic behavior. Moreover, the study provides information on the influence each source has on students' efficacy so that teachers, by consulting sources, may help students in creating and cultivating the desired belief to improve students' writing performance. Parents and schools may find the research important in planning actions that are in agreement with students' beliefs. Thus, the study could be indicative of the writing behavior of students. This may help students to gauge their own efficacy and strive for the improvement of their own writing performance.

## **Scope of the Study**

The subjects of this study were grade 11 students in two schools in Bahir Dar town: Bahir Dar Preparatory and Bahir Dar Academy. The study was designed to investigate the relationship among sources of writing efficacy writing self-efficacy and writing performance. Exploring multifaceted environmental and economic variations between the schools was beyond the scope of the study. The study, aimed at investigating the relationships

among variables and measuring the influence of sources on the writing efficacy of students in both schools.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### ***Defining the Concept of Self-Efficacy***

Three decades have passed since Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory was introduced. Since then the theory has attracted the attention of scholars and researchers of diverse disciplines. In theorizing self-efficacy beliefs, Bandura (1977a) expresses his fear that the concept of self-efficacy may be misunderstood by some researchers and/or scholars. The term has a precise definition. It is "...peoples' beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1994, p.2). The forerunner of self-efficacy research today, Frank Pajares, strongly cautions researchers to clearly differentiate self-efficacy beliefs from other self constructs such as self-esteem, self-concept (Pajares, 1997, 2008) and outcome expectancy (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b).

It is sometimes assumed that self-efficacy is an overlapping concept with self-esteem. But the two are distinct concepts. According to Pajares (2008, p. 409), the latter is a "broad evaluation of oneself, complete with the judgments of self-worth that accompany such evaluations." As Neill (1996) explains, self-esteem refers to general feelings of self-worth or self-value. On the contrary, self-efficacy is concerned with the belief one has about his/her own capabilities to perform specific tasks. In other words, central to self-efficacy is capability evaluation, and to self-esteem is judgmental value of oneself. Thus, one can deduce that self-efficacy beliefs are constructs which provide answers to "*I can*", and they are about neither "*I will*" nor "*I feel*" items (Bandura, 1995, 1997; Pajares, 2008). The other concept which seems to be confused with self-efficacy is self-concept. Nevertheless, the two constructs differ in that self-concept is more general and less sensitive to specific emotional contexts. A good self-concept item may, for instance,

be “*I am good at*” *English* (Bandura, 1995, p. 8) which is dissimilar to self-efficacy items such as ‘*I can write a compound sentence in English*’. This tells us that self-concept is not item-specific as self-efficacy is. In an interview with Bembenutty, Pajares describes self-esteem beliefs as a reflection of “...questions of *being* and *feeling* (Who am I? Do I like myself? How do I feel about myself as a writer?)” (Bembenutty, 2007). Outcome expectations are also sometimes confused. They are rather beliefs of success which are predicted after a certain course of action (Bandura, 1977b).

We can, therefore, see that even though self-efficacy is seen from a single corner, capability judgment, the effect it puts on students’ learning can be interpreted in many contexts.

### ***Interface between Self-Efficacy and Academic Performance***

Over the past three decades, research has turned its face to the role self-efficacy beliefs can play in various academic disciplines among which mathematics and language skills are at the forefront. Research findings (e.g. Pajares, 1996a) Pajares and Schunk, 2001; Pajares and Johnson, 1994; Millis et al., 2007) indicate that self-efficacy beliefs influence overall actions of people in general, and students’ academic performance in particular. These research reports support Bandura’s hypothesis that self-efficacy beliefs of students correlate positively with their academic achievements. The indication is that highly efficacious learners would tend to perform better than those who believe that they are incapable of performing a task in question. Research (e.g. Zemmerman and Bandura, 1994), indicates that self-efficacy directly affects academic achievement ( $\beta = 0.26$ ) and indirectly through grade goals ( $\beta = 0.31$ ), both at  $P < 0.05$ , which shows that the influence of efficacy on achievement is significant.

In sum, one can infer that success in a foreign language may be attributed to students’ beliefs about their own capabilities to perform tasks given to them (Millis et al., 2007). Thus, it can possibly be said that foreign language

learners who doubt their capabilities to perform better in various skills would tend to be debilitated, and thereby would be less likely to score better in exams and tests.

### ***Self-Efficacy and EFL Writing Performance***

As Pajares and Valiante (2006) point out, writing is not only a process of making meaning but an activity through which individuals engage in self understanding. Writing, according to Veit, Gould and Clifford (1990, p. 4), is “a complex process involving dozens of previously acquired skills.” Writing may be difficult partly because it is a solitary task which requires the writer’s psychological strength to cope with all the challenges indicated in the above paragraph (Byrne, 1988; Raimes, 1983). Thus, although cooperative writing may sometimes be possible, writing, in most cases, is an individual activity where the writer conveys his/her message to the reader who is presumed to be physically non-existent. Therefore, it is up to the writer to imagine the audience, determine purpose and communicate in the intended way. It is the writer who faces the challenges in the process of writing. As Yonas (1996) states, the writers’ engagement in the whole of writing process would probably seek his/her vigorous beliefs among other things. One of such beliefs is self-efficacy.

Unlike such theoretical developments, historically, researchers in the field of language teaching and composition made their focus on the methodological issues and classroom practices of learning and/or teaching various skills (see Pajares and Valiante, 2006). However, it seems today that the focus has also been diverted to the boundaries of psychological variables and language teaching and learning. Following this, self-efficacy was considered to influence learners’ linguistic performances in general and writing achievement in particular (Pajares, 1994; Hampton and Mason, 2003; Millis et al., 2007; Pajares, 2003; Zimmerman and Bandura, 1994). Findings from path of inquiry (e.g. Pajares and Valiante, 2006) show that students’ beliefs about their own writing processes and competences are influential in their ultimate success as writers. Accordingly, it is possible to say the task of

writing cannot be detached from self-efficacy beliefs although the traditionally *think, plan* and *write* procedures are devoid of such psychological matters.

Various studies have noted a positive relationship between self-efficacy and performance in academic subjects. Bandura (1995) reports that the correlation between self-efficacy and general academic performance may range from  $r=0.49$  to  $0.70$ . Pajares (2007), on the other side, claims that the “typical” correlation range between self-efficacy beliefs and writing achievement in most studies is from  $0.30$  to  $0.50$ . Whatever is proposed, there may be a tendency for efficacy and performance to be positively correlated.

By way of summarizing, it may be stated that self-efficacy is the best predictor of writing performance (Pajares, 2003; Pajares and Johnson, 1994) among psychological constructs. A strong sense of efficacy can, other than performance, influence choices students’ make, effort they expend, persistence and perseverance they exert to produce good compositions (Pajares, 2003; Bandura, 1997a, 1977b). It can also influence self-regulatory learning that students do for themselves in a proactive way (Zimmerman and Bandura, 1994; Zimmerman and Martinez-Ponz, 2004).

## **Sources of Self-Efficacy**

### ***Mastery Experience***

Mastery experience is one of the efficacy building sources. It refers to “the interpreted result of [students’] own previous attainments” (Usher and Pajares, 2008, p. 4). Mastery experience, in other words, is connected to the previous accomplishments of students in certain domain of tasks, and the interpretation of these accomplishments by students themselves. It may not necessarily be the actual score students earned on specific tasks before, but it is students’ own understanding of these achievements or scores. In connection to this, Bandura (1997), in Schunk and Pajares (2009), states



that the sources of self-efficacy information may not necessarily be interpreted as judgments of competence.

Mastery experience is proposed as the most effective source of efficacy through which learners can build a robust sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994, 1995, 1997; Schunk and Pajares, 2007; Pajares et al., 2007; Schunk and Pajares, 2009; Pajares, 2008). Thus, students' judgments about their prior academic accomplishments provide best efficacy information. Previous level of success in academic careers better predicts the strength of the self-efficacy. In other words, successes raise mastery expectation; repeated failures lower them, particularly if the mishaps occur early in course of events. After strong efficacy expectations are developed through repeated success, the negative impact of occasional failures is likely to be reduced. Indeed, occasional failures that are later overcome by determined effort can strengthen [self efficacy]...if one finds through experience that even the most difficult obstacles can be mastered by sustained effort (Bandura, 1977b).

In a nutshell, it could be said students engage in learning, take exams, interpret their performances in one way or another, and apply it to build their level of academic self-efficacy. Cognizant of their interpreted success, students can be ready to enhance their efficacy. Therefore, outcome interpreted as success will raise the sense of efficacy, and that interpretation of achievement as failure will lower the efficacy (Pajares, 2003, 2008; Usher and Pajares, 2008; Bandura, 1977b, 1994; Pajares and Valiante, 2006; Pajares et al. 2007; Schunk and Pajares, 2009).

### ***Vicarious Experience***

Vicarious experience, learning via observation, is another possible source of efficacy information. As Pajares (2004, p. 2) says, "People learn not only from their own experience, but by observing the behaviours of others." Seeing others perform threatening activities without adverse results, encourages others observe dare to face similar challenges with strong perseverance (Bandura, 1977b). Hazardous experiences which are

frequently proved and displayed by a variety of models are more effective than those displayed by the same model (Bandura, 1977b). This is because exposure to various successful models will enhance students' sense of efficacy (Bandura 1977a, 1977b, 1994). More importantly, models who can go through ups and downs [coping models] are more likely to boost observers' efficacy than "mastery models who respond to mistakes as though they never make them" (Schunk, 1983; 1987; Schunk and Hanson, 1985, 1988; cited in Usher and Pajares, 2008: 5). When exposed to bad social role models, students who fail to confront challenging tasks would tend to lessen their efficacy. But social models that are emblems of strength, persistence and perseverance are likely to have a positive effect in taking observer's sense of efficacy to a higher level. It can, however, be seen that the observed and the observer should have many characteristics in common, if influence of one is to affect the other's capability belief (Bandura, 1994). However, Usher and Pajares (2008) do not seem to accept this view of Bandura. They believe that perceived similarity between the model and the observer is not necessarily indicative of the power of social models. In reconciling the two views, Bandura (1997) states that even though students are exposed to dissimilar models, they may not necessarily ignore the information. Successful models exert a positive impact. Citing Bandura (2004), Usher and Pajares (2008) report that peers in classroom or out and family members are the most influential models. The role of media, they also add, has to be taken into account.

The whole of vicarious experience, therefore, would create a sense "If they can do it, so can I" in the observer's mind (Pajares, 2008). Thus, all the above considerations about vicarious experience play significant roles in creating stronger efficacy beliefs.

### ***Social Persuasions***

Students are surrounded by different others among whom parents, peers and teachers are at the forefront. Encouragement from these parties will likely cultivate students' confidence; on the contrary, discouraging of

students' performance will adversely debilitate their sense of competence (Bandura 1977a, 1977b, 1994, 1997; Pajares, et al., 2007; Usher and Pajares, 2008). "But social persuasions are not empty praise or inspirational statements" (Schunk and Pajares, 2009: 5). They have to knock at the capability beliefs of students so that students may feel a given task is attainable with their best effort and persistence.

Thus, what teachers and parents comment on students' performances has an indispensable role in building up the students' self-efficacy. The feedback students receive from different parties may affect, not only their beliefs of capabilities to perform tasks but it may also influence their "attitudes toward school in general or toward specific subject matter" in particular (Stipek, 1984; Schunk 1989; mentioned in Nuru, 2000, p.10).

Therefore, positive verbal persuasions could contribute significantly to students' academic success, while negative criticisms would produce negative consequences. Research findings in this sphere (Pajares, et al., 2007, Pajares, 1994) indicate that social persuasions (feedbacks) predict students' self-efficacy strength, even though the findings may vary across different circumstances. Millrood (2001) and Italo (1999) both emphasize the role feedback could play in boosting the overall performance of students in foreign language learning environments.

To sum up, what comes from parents, peers or teachers about students' linguistic performance- verbal or non-verbal- would influence learners' capability beliefs and EFL learning as a whole.

### ***Physiological States***

Students, as they contemplate classroom tasks would find themselves desperate about some activities. This time, physiological states such as anxiety, stress, depression, fatigue and mood, will control over students' functioning (Usher and Pajares, 2008; Pajares et al., 2007; Bandura, 1977b, 1995). We realize that these emotional feelings create discomfort inside

ourselves. It is not such feelings in individuals which solely affect behaviour. It is rather the ways people interpret these emotions which highly influence their functions (Bandura, 1994; Usher and Pajares, 2008). Some people “interpret their stress reactions and tensions as signs of vulnerability to poor performance” (Bandura, 1994, p. 3). For instance, Arnold and Brown (1999) contend that physiological states, such as anxiety and nervousness, have a “down-spiraling” effect on students’ language performance. This argument is refuted, however. It seems that if learners are pessimistic about their emotions such as anxiety, they would probably trigger another nervousness which may collapse their performance. But it does not always mean that “typical anxiety experienced before an important endeavor is a guide to low self-efficacy” and/or performance (Bandura, 1995, p.4). Thus, what matters is not necessarily the sense of anxiety, but the meaning learners give to it and the way they interpret it.

Some learners may of course interpret their anxiety or stress or fatigue as an indication of weak performance. These learners create strong association between anxiety and weak performance in EFL. Such strong (either negative or positive) physiological states provide information about the students’ level of efficacy (Pajares, et al., 2007). Pajares, et al. indicate that exam anxiety and stress are usually signs of low self-efficacy.

Findings in many studies indicate that, of the four, mastery experience, has accounted for the strongest influence of students’ self-efficacy in Science (Britner and Pajares, 2006) and writing (Pajares, et al., 2007). In another study, Pajares (1994) reported the significant contribution of social persuasions to boost self-efficacy. In a study conducted by Hampton & Mason (2003), all the four sources predicted self-efficacy. However, physiological states showed no significant contribution to self-efficacy in other studies (Pajares et al., 2007).

### ***Self-Efficacy and Gender***

Many studies attempted to investigate the relationship between students' gender and their mathematics ability (Pajares, 2005; Yalew, 1997; Mustofa, 2006; Asefa, 2006) and students' gender and their language skills (Pajares et al., 2007; Schunk, 2003). The reports reveal that females are strongly confident in language arts, whereas males have strong capability beliefs in math and science subjects.

Even though girls show strong confidence at elementary levels, their confidence is likely to diminish as they go to higher levels (Pajares, 2003; Pajares & Valiante, 2006; Usher and Pajares, 2008). Pajares (2003), on the other hand, reports that although girls and boys have equal levels of confidence in higher grades, it was realized that girls' achievement in writing excelled that of boys'. This gradual decrease in self-efficacy among girls is significantly associated with socio-economic factors (Pajares, 2003; Tilaye, 1997). In another study, Andargachew (2004) found males' reading efficacy and achievement surpassed those of females'.

In Ethiopia, where people are firmly bounded by socio-cultural and economic snags, it would be difficult to entertain ideal gender equality. In schools, for instance, Tilaye (1997) found that most girls, due to various reasons dropout of school and as a result, few would be moving forward. Thus, gender stereotypical thoughts, as Pajares (2003) underlines will affect the confidence boys or girls possess. The foreign language environment cannot have a different fate. In another study, Millis et al., (2007) found that even though females show strong efficacy beliefs in a foreign language, their performance could not surpass that of the males.

## **Research Methods**

### ***The Research Design***

The study is principally a correlational one. Therefore, the design is descriptive research. In addition, statistical techniques which are explained in the following section were employed. The variables (both dependent and independent) are indicated in the *conceptual framework* of the study.

### ***Subjects and Sampling Technique***

The study focused on two schools found in Bahir Dar town. One of these was Bahir Dar Preparatory School, the only government school offering education at preparatory level, in the town, and the other was Bahir Dar Academy, a private school offering education at a similar level.

Cluster sampling technique was utilized to recruit the participants from the schools. This technique was used, because there were 'naturally' formed groups (sections). Thus, 138 grade 11 students, 91 from Bahir Dar Preparatory, and 47 from Bahir Dar Academy, were taken as samples. The latter (47) was the total number of students (one section) in the private school, Bahir Dar Academy; whereas 91 students were the total participants in randomly selected three out of fifteen sections of the government school, Bahir Dar Preparatory. The figure (138) does not, however, include those whose responses were discarded, for some items were lacking completeness. Preparatory students were made targets of the study mainly due to the fact that a variety of writing activities begin at this stage.

### ***Data Gathering Instruments***

Two instruments, questionnaires and a test were employed to gather the data from both groups of students.

### **Questionnaires**

Two questionnaires, one for measuring students' writing efficacy and another for measuring sources of writing efficacy were used.

A questionnaire which was employed to measure students' level of self-efficacy beliefs to perform writing tasks was slightly adapted from the instrument used by Pajares, Britner and Valiante (2000). Though the instrument was a standardised one, it was piloted on a small group of students (n=11). I asked students if the form and questions seemed straightforward. Based on the feedbacks obtained from the students, some items (items 1, 9 and 10) in the questionnaire were revised to achieve clarity.

The failure in accurately measuring self-efficacy in most research works, according to Bandura (2006), arises from invalid measurement items of the variable in question. Many researchers, who attempted to measure self-efficacy, were found to measure learners' hopes and attitudes which might have led them to wrong conclusions. The questionnaire was prepared to gather data on students' capability beliefs to perform specific writing tasks in English. A 0 (no chance) through 50 (moderately certain) to 100 (completely certain) scale, where subjects could gauge their writing self-efficacy level in terms of percentage, was used to collect data. In other words, a respondent was made to gauge his/her efficacy by writing any number from 0 to 100 for an item. The scale is proved for its validity and psychological strength (Pajares, Hartley and Valiante, 2001; Bandura, 2006).

The other questionnaire on sources of efficacy was adapted from a profile of items collected by Usher and Pajares (2008). For each of the four sources, students were provided with items of a Likert type scale ranging from 1-6 (*Definitely False to Definitely True*). The respondents were made to indicate the extent to which a statement in the questionnaire was true or false for them. This was explained well in the questionnaire itself. A similar pilot test was carried out in order to modify some items for better clarity. Since the

items were standardized, it was presumed that there existed strong reliability.

### ***Test***

Writing test items were developed based on grade 11 English textbook in use at the time this data was gathered. This was done in collaboration with an English teacher from each school. The test items were written parallel to the writing self-efficacy items. In other words, the self-efficacy items were reflections of writing sections included in grade 11 English textbook. A match between efficacy items and the writing test was kept to guarantee validity. For instance, students were presented with a short text to be accurately punctuated. This was needed because they were given a self-efficacy item that asked them about their confidence to perform that task.

### ***Data Analysis Procedure***

This research was quantitative. It tried to investigate the relationship between level of efficacy beliefs and achievements in writing skills. Besides, the influence of each source on the writing efficacy of students was weighed for both groups (government and private school students) and the results were compared to see if there were significant differences.

Firstly, data on students' level of efficacy to perform writing tasks in an EFL test were gathered. Secondly, based on rubrics [answer key], as Wiersma (1995) and Atkins, Hailom and Nuru (1996) suggest, the marking was made by two teachers (one from each school). The mean score was used for further analysis. Students' self-efficacy beliefs were coded and summed up, and the whole score was correlated with their achievement in the writing test. The effect of sources was measured through regression analysis. Ultimately, t-tests were employed to measure the differences between the two schools' students on the one hand and gender groups on the other.



## Discussion and Interpretation

### The Self-Efficacy and Writing Performance Analysis

Students from the government and private schools were measured for their English writing self-efficacy and writing performance. The former was correlated to the latter. The overall correlation between the variables (writing self-efficacy and writing performance) for the whole sample was 0.60 which was found to be significant ( $df=136$   $p<0.001$ ). The squared value of  $r$  is approximately 0.35 which indicates that 35% of the writing performance of students might have occurred due to the corresponding self-efficacy belief they possessed about writing.

**Table 1: Correlation between Writing Self-efficacy and Writing Performance**

		Writing Self-Efficacy	Writing Performance
Writing Self-Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	1	.595(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	138	138

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

The self-efficacy and writing performance correlation found in this study surpasses many other findings (e.g.  $r=0.32$  by Shell, et al., 1989;  $r=0.342$  by Anteneh, 2004) Regardless of the differences in the correlations, these findings and the present study indicate that there is a linear and significant correlation between writing efficacy and writing performance. Another study (Alamirew, 2005), on the contrary, reports a very weak and non-significant relationship ( $r=0.107$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) between writing self-efficacy and writing performance. However, Alamirew's items are quite different qualitatively and quantitatively. Furthermore, in his study, Alamirew (2005) measured efficacy in three point scale (high, moderate and low) which, according to Pajares, Hartley and Valiante (2001) and Bandura (2006), is psychologically weaker than the full (0-100) scale.

## Writing Efficacy and Writing Performance of Government and Private School Students

The writing efficacy of government and private school students was 68.69 and 87.2 with standard deviations (SDs) of 15.65 and 11.3 respectively. They, in the same order, had writing performances of 15.98 and 23.62 (SDs=7.52 and 7.09). We cannot at this stage talk whether this is significant. The following t-test table, therefore, shows whether the differences shown above are statistically significant.

**Table 2: Independent Samples t-test for Government and Private School Students' Writing Efficacy and Performance**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									lower	Upper
Writing Self-Efficacy	Equal variances Assumed	7.81	.006	-7.17	136	.000	-18.48	2.57	-23.56	-13.38
	Equal variances not assumed			-7.94	121.4	.000	-18.48	2.33	-23.08	-13.87
Writing Performance	Equal variances assumed	.76	.38	-5.76	136	.000	-7.64	1.33	-10.26	-5.017
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.87	98.06	.000	-7.64	1.301	-10.22	-5.057

The independent samples t-test indicates that students in the private school significantly outperformed in both writing self-efficacy ( $t=7.94$ ,  $df=136$ , mean difference=18.48,  $p=0.00$ ) and writing performance ( $t=5.76$ ,  $df=136$ , mean difference=7.64,  $p=0.00$ ). The p-value in both cases is below 0.001 implying that the differences are significant. The overall finding is that private school students' capability belief was found well flourished while government school students' capability beliefs were found debilitated. This may perhaps be

attributed to different socio-economic and environmental variations that these students experience.

### Gender, Writing Efficacy and Performance in Government and Private Schools

The study indicated that both males and females in private schools significantly excelled their government school counterparts in both writing efficacy and writing performance. The mean writing efficacy of males was found 78.12 (SD=14.22) and that of females was 72.27 (SD =18.35). On the other hand, the writing performance of females and males was 19.20 and 18.04 (SDs= 7.60 and 8.70) respectively. However, these mean scores cannot tell us whether the differences are significant. To check this, a t-test was employed.

**Table 3: Independent Samples t-Test for gender versus writing efficacy and performance**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									lower	Upper
Writing Self-Efficacy	Equal variances assumed	6.49	.012	2.07	136	.040	5.85	2.83	.26	11.44
	Equal variances not assumed			2.11	136	.037	5.85	2.78	.36	11.34
Writing Performance	Equal variances assumed	3.91	.050	.83	136	.408	1.16	1.40	-1.61	3.94
	Equal variances not assumed			.84	135.98	.404	1.16	1.39	-1.58	3.90

Taking the whole sample as a group, it was found out that males significantly excelled females in writing self-efficacy ( $t=2.11$ ,  $df=136$ , mean difference=5.85,  $p<0.05$ ); whereas no significant difference was exhibited between the actual writing performance of males and females ( $t=0.83$ ,  $df=136$ , mean difference=1.16,  $p>0.05$ ). Generally speaking, it is clear from the results that female students have debilitated capability beliefs even though their actual performance in writing skill was not significantly excelled by male counterparts.

It seems that the difference might have resulted from variations between males and females in the government school. This is because independent samples t-test conducted for each gender group in the schools showed different results. It was indicated that the writing self-efficacy of government school males significantly surpassed that of their female counterparts in the school ( $t=3.45$ ,  $df=89$ , mean difference=1.85,  $p=0.001$ ). This difference was not, however, exhibited in the writing performance of these students. Even though government school males showed a slightly better performance in writing, the difference was found non-significant ( $t=1.172$ ,  $df=89$ , mean difference= 1.85,  $p=0.244$ ). On the contrary, such variations did not work for males and females in the private school; they had more or less similar efficacy and performance. Even though male students in the private school showed better writing efficacy and performance, the differences were found statistically non-significant for both writing efficacy ( $t=0.162$ ,  $df=45$ , mean difference=0.55,  $p=0.872$ ) and writing performance ( $t=0.806$ ,  $df=45$ , mean difference=1.7,  $p=0.425$ ). In each case, the p-value is greater than 0.05.

In sum, government school female students possessed lower capability beliefs whereas private school females were found almost equally competent with male counterparts in their own school.

### The Influence of Efficacy Sources on Writing Self-Efficacy

This study also investigated the influence efficacy sources on the writing efficacy of students. The analyses were, thus, made for the whole sample and for each school and gender groups independently.

The correlation of efficacy sources (the predictors) and writing self-efficacy (the predicted) as indicated in the Model Summary is 0.645. The Adjusted R square (0.399) indicates that 39.9 percent of the variance in writing self-efficacy can be predicted from the independent variables (*mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion and physiological states for writing*). This is, therefore, an overall measure of the strength of association. It does not reflect the extent to which the group of independent variables predicts the dependent variable (writing self-efficacy).

**Table 4: ANOVA table for Influence of Efficacy Sources on Writing Self-Efficacy**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	16040.913	4	4010.228	23.740	.000(a)
	Residual	22466.504	133	168.921		
	Total	38507.417	137			

a Predictors: (Constant), Physiological States, Vicarious Experience, Social Persuasion, Mastery Experience

b Dependent Variable: Writing Self-Efficacy

The group (i.e. *mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion and physiological states for writing*) collectively predicted writing efficacy significantly ( $F=23.74$ ,  $df=137$  and  $p<0.001$ ). This result, however, cannot address the ability of any of the independent variables to predict the dependent variable. We can also see the extent to which each source pushes the predicted variable (writing efficacy). The following table reveals this.

Table 5: Parameter Estimates of Sources of Writing Efficacy Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	
1	(Constant)	50.097	9.936		5.04	.000
	Mastery Experience	1.017	.401	.217	2.54	.012
	Vicarious Experience	.716	.383	.146	1.87	.064
	Social Persuasion	.513	.319	.129	1.61	.110
	Physiological States	-1.242	.281	-.349	-4.42	.000

a Dependent Variable: Writing Self-Efficacy

As can be seen from the regression coefficient table, two of the independent variables, vicarious experience and social persuasion, each had a non significant contribution ( $\beta=0.146$ ,  $t=1.87$ ,  $p>0.05$  and  $\beta=0.129$ ,  $t=1.61$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) respectively. Mastery experience on the other hand, was found to have a significant positive influence on students' writing efficacy ( $\beta=0.217$ ,  $t=2.535$ ,  $p=0.012$ ). When students believed that their efforts have been successful in their previous writing tasks, their confidence to accomplish similar writing tasks rose. On the contrary, when they believed that their efforts to write well failed, their confidence to succeed in similar endeavors was diminished. And such interpretations were found to be powerful in determining the writing efficacy of students. The other variable, physiological states, had a significant negative effect on the writing efficacy of students ( $\beta=-0.349$ ,  $t=-4.417$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). This means that factors such as anxiety, stress and psychological instability could significantly lower the writing efficacy of students.

Looking into each school's context, the group containing the four sources shows that the group together significantly influenced the writing self-efficacy of students in the government school ( $F=8.888$ ,  $df=86$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) and the private school ( $F=6.626$ ,  $df=42$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). On one side, when others are controlled, physiological states significantly negatively influenced government school students' writing efficacy ( $\beta=-0.279$ ,  $t=-2.779$ ,  $p=0.007$ ) while its effect, though negative, was found to be a non significant one for private school students ( $\beta=0.122$ ,  $t=0.777$ ,  $p=0.442$ ). On the other side, mastery experience significantly influenced private school students' writing efficacy ( $\beta=0.521$ ,  $t=3.786$ ,  $p=0.002$ ) while its effect was found to be a non significant one for government school students ( $\beta=0.164$ ,  $t=1.483$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). It seems, therefore, that private school students depended on their own previous performances more than government school students did for their writing self-efficacy beliefs.

### **Conclusion, Recommendations and Pedagogical Implications**

The findings unravel that the beliefs individuals possess about themselves determine their ultimate success. As Dornyei (2001) states, success in foreign language learning is partly a result of various psychological and social factors. Likewise, the writing efficacy of students in both schools (Bahir Dar Preparatory and Bahir Dar Academy) could determine the ultimate writing performance of these students.

Students, regardless of the efforts they exert, may sometimes face insurmountable writing tasks in EFL classes. In order for them to succeed in the tasks, they need to have the demanded linguistic skills. The efficacy beliefs students possess about their own capabilities were found to be potential determiners of performance. Therefore, as seen in the findings, students' writing self-efficacy should be cultivated for better performance in the skill. When students believe that their efforts have been successful, their confidence to accomplish similar writing tasks is raised (Usher and Pajares, 2008). As a result, students will likely build their sense of capability to perform writing tasks and ensure better accomplishments. To this end, they

should be helped from different corners. Parents, teachers, schools and other bodies should be in the lead to push students' efficacy beliefs upward.

It was found out that the self-efficacy sources, i.e. Mastery Experience, Vicarious Experience, Social Persuasions, and Physiological States altogether predicted the writing efficacy students. When others controlled, Vicarious Experience and Social persuasions each had a non-significant positive influence on students' writing self efficacy whereas Mastery Experience was the only significant predictor of the students' writing efficacy.

Parents, peers, and teachers have at least one key role to play: building students' self-efficacy via careful consultation of the four sources. If this is done, students will probably continue to strive in the face of difficulties of writing tasks. If, on the contrary, comments are fierce and directed toward students' weaknesses, they would tend to create weaker feelings inside these students. As Usher and Pajares (2008) state, increasing students' physical and emotional well-being and reducing negative emotional states is indispensable to boost their EFL writing efficacy and thereby performance. More importantly, female students should receive special treatments to build positive and strong capability beliefs. In addition, it is recommended that government schools and their students need to strive to consult efficacy sources and thereby enhance their accomplishments in EFL writing.

Studies that aim at investigating the multifaceted nature of private and government schools should be carried out to add something to the betterment of the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). It is suggested the socio-cultural issues related to TEFL be widely investigated so that the gaps could be narrowed. The search continues until we untie the 'knot' for our learners!



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