The Consistency between Writing Self-efficacy and Writing Performance

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Abstract—**This study aimed to evaluate the consistency between tertiary learners' writing self-efficacy and writing performance evaluation in academic writing in order to understand the tertiary students' self-efficacy phenomena in learning to write. Two measurements were analysed and compared namely the learners' writing self-efficacy scales and learners' writing performance. Basically, it is a case study where 33 UPM students participated in the research for four months. In this study, the learners' writing self-efficacy was assessed based on the writing self-efficacy (WSE) scale adapted from Bottomley, Henk & Melnick (1997), while, the document analysis was based on the students' writing performance throughout the four months. Overall, this study did not mainly based on the score of WSE scales only but also looked from the angle of the students' writing performance by looking at writing skills in detail namely content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and mechanic of writing. Here, the analysis of the essay and rating was done from the perspective of Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, & Hughey (1981) and adapted by Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1992). In order to plot the consistency and trend of the two measurements (WSE and writing skills), ratio and Chi-square analysis were carried out using SPSS program. Findings showed that the distribution of writing skills performance vary depending on the self-efficacy level (i.e. high, average and low self-efficacy level).**

Index Terms—**writing skills, writing self-efficacy level, tertiary leaners**

I. INTRODUCTION

In previous years, the 2005 School Certificate Examination Report on English Language 2 showed that a high number secondary schools learners were still unable to grasp the required skills in writing (Samuel & Zaitun Bakar, 2008). In 2008, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has recognized writing as the major difficulty for learners to obtain good marks either at higher certificate level (SPM) or lower secondary certificate level (PMR). This is due to the fact that writing component bears 85 marks of the total marks at the SPM level and 60 marks at the PMR level. "Year after year, examiners express with great dismay the fact that after having learnt English language for eleven years, Malaysian rural learners in most cases fail to produce even a short paragraph of intelligible writing" (Samuel & Zaitun Bakar, 2008 as cited in Ilyana Jalaluddin, Melor Md Yunus & Hamidah Yamat, 2011, p. 1845). Malaysian government has carried out many programmes as an effort to attract rural area learners especially to learn and master the English language. "One of the government programmes is the *First Step Program* which emphasises on reading and writing to help rural learners improve their command of English" (Ilyana Jalaluddin, Melor Md Yunus & Hamidah Yamat, 2011, p. 1845). However, the MOE reported that "the effectiveness of the programme and the quality of teachers teaching the language in rural schools is still a big question" (Anon, 2008, p. 19). This is because "the command of English language in rural schools, in Teluk Intan specifically, is still poor" (Anon, 2008, p. 19). Despite 11 years of learning, Malaysian learners still feel writing in English as a difficult task and to them, it has very few social uses in life (Chitravelu et. al, 2005). According to Samuel and Zaitun Bakar (2008, p. 1):

Learners in rural schools generally find it difficult to maintain their interest in English language learning as English is not seen as important for their immediate need. Teachers on their part are unable to sustain learners' genuine interest in continuing to learn English and to use the language once the examination is over.

Writing is not an easy task as it is a highly complex and demanding task that requires a number of skills to be performed. It is a complex cognitive activity involving attention at multiple levels: thematic, paragraph, sentence, grammatical and lexical (Lavelle, Smith & O'Ryan, 2002). Hidi and Pietro (2008, p. 145) noted that "writers, in contrast to readers, produce/create texts rather than simply consume them and, writers often have minimal

environment/curricular input". For example, "when given a topic to write about, the ideas and text generated require a knowledge base on which the individual can draw" (MacArthur, Graham & Fitzgerald, 2008, p. 145). In addition, "the complexity of the task, the solitary nature of the activity, with no immediate feedback and the effort needed to persist in the task are other aspects of writing that can adversely affect writing" (Hidi & Pietro, 2008, p. 145). Even though writing can be approached via teaching, it is still not an easy task transform one's thought to written communication as it requires many other levels of complementary skills. Some of the complementary skills that add to the difficulty of acquiring writing skills are outlined by Montague and Leavell (1994) as cited in Scott and Vitale (2003, p. 220):

Writing requires co-ordination and integration of multiple processes, including planning, production, editing, and revision. Composing requires prior knowledge of topic, genre, conventions, and rules as well as the ability to access, use and organise that knowledge when writing.

With the complexity that the learners will face when writing, learners will experience various kinds of scarcity and are often feel devastate when involve in writing activities (Scott & Vitale, 2003).

Scott and Vitale (2003, p. 221) identified that learners' writing problems range "from lower level mechanical problems such as spelling, capitalisation, and punctuation, to higher order cognitive and metacognitive problems such as planning and revision". The writer also suffers from the disadvantage of not getting immediate feedback from the reader and sometimes not getting feedback at all (Harmer, 2000). Nevertheless, even though the learners will face all the difficulties, it is still feasible to teach and guide the learners to acquire the necessary skills and the process in writing (Graham & Harris, 2000 as cited in Scott and Vitale, 2003). Marchisan and Alber (2001, p. 154) pointed out that "it is crucial to understand that learners will write and will care about writing when it is personal, and with extra support and guidance from more capable individuals, writers can benefit from writing experience". Hidi and Pietro (2008) further elaborated that "nurturing learners' positive beliefs or self-efficacy about writing, fostering authentic writing goals and contexts, providing learners with a supportive context for writing, and creating a positive emotional classroom environment are the conditions that determine learners' motivation to write" (MacArthur, Graham & Fitzgerald, 2008, p. 145). The role of self-efficacy has received extensive support from a growing body of findings from diverse fields in the United States for meta-analysis of research on the correlation between self-efficacy and academic performance. Nevertheless, there is one area which has obtained less attention from self-efficacy researcher that is writing skills. The few researchers (Pajares & Johnson, 1995; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Ergul, 2004; Pajares, 2003; Rahil Mahyuddin et al., 2006; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007) who have investigated self-efficacy beliefs and essay writing agree that the two are related. However, the studies conducted to explore the relationship between self-efficacy and writing have been correlational researches so far. The studies conducted were basically based on the correlation between scores on self-efficacy and holistic essay scores. This study tries to look at different angle by studying the dependency between writing self-efficacy and writing performance, and plot the consistency pattern of the relationship of these variables.

Socio-cognitive theory: Fundamental of the study

Social cognitive theory is used as the theoretical framework to pursue the study on the development of the learners' self-efficacy. Overall, Bandura's social cognitive model emphasises effective learning as involving three elements: the person (internal), the behaviour, and the environment. This is because "how people interpret the results of their own behaviour informs and alters their environments and the personal factors they possess which, in turn, inform and alter subsequent behaviour" (Pajares, 2004, p.1). This is the foundation of Bandura's (1986) conception of *reciprocal determinism*, the view that (a) personal factors in the form of cognition, affect, and biological events, (b) behaviour, and (c) environmental influences, create interactions that result in a *triadic reciprocality* (Pajares & Usher, 2008, p. 392). In the model of triadic reciprocality, the behaviour, personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of one another. This model is illustrated in Figure 1 below:
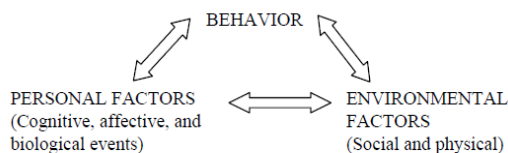

Figure 1   Bandura's concept of triadic reciprocity behaviour
Source: Bandura (1986)

Briefly, the theory portrays that the three factors which are environment, personal factors and behaviour are all constantly influence one another. "With respect to the link between personal factors and behaviour, learners' self-efficacy beliefs influence achievement behaviour such as choice of tasks, effort, persistence, and achievement" (Schunk, 2003, p. 160). This implies that when the learners have high self-efficacy in writing, they are probably more optimistic and confident in completing their writing tasks. Conversely, learners' behaviours can also alter efficacy beliefs. For example, as they work on their writing tasks, they notice their progress and capabilities in writing. This goal progress and accomplishment will convey to the learners that they are capable of performing well. As a consequence, it enhances self-efficacy for continued writing. As noted by Pajares and Valiante (2008, p. 159), "learners' academic

accomplishments can often be better predicted by their self-efficacy beliefs than by their previous attainments, knowledge, or skills".

The connection of self-efficacy in writing

Bandura (1986, p. 391) defined self-efficacy as "people's judgments of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances". In short, self-efficacy is a judgment of the confidence that one has in one's abilities, and the answers to the self-efficacy questions such as "Can I write well" reveal whether one possesses high or low confidence to accomplish the tasks or succeed at the activity (Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

Spicer (2004) further outlined three dimensions which govern self-efficacy. The first dimension refers to the level of task difficulty. According to Spicer (2004, p. 1), "the magnitude of one's self-efficacy beliefs will differ upon how difficult he/she perceives a task to be; a task may be perceived as easy resulting in high self-efficacy, whereas a task thought to be difficult may lower self-efficacy". The second dimension is the area or domain to which one's self-efficacy beliefs are applied. Spicer (2004) termed the second dimension as generality. For example, through generality, learners may have high self-efficacy for writing when they believe that writing is a necessary component of their study. Thus, they will work hard, have high perseverance and will succeed eventually. A learner with low writing self-efficacy may feel insecure and not confident that he would be able to complete the writing task successfully.

The final dimension of one's self-efficacy is strength (Spicer, 2004). According to Spicer (2004), learners with strong self-efficacy have a high perseverance to confront any challenge in comparison to the students with weaker self-efficacy. Thus, it can be concluded that a low self-efficacy learner may easily alter his self-efficacy belief when confronting any challenge, even though he might achieved successful outcome before. Strength is a dimension which must be considered when measuring self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Strength, as used by Bandura (1981), describes "how strong a person's sense of self-efficacy is". "People who have strong beliefs in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided" (Bandura, 1997, p. 39). Such an affirmative orientation fosters interest and engrossing involvement in activities (Pajares, 1995).

In sum, one of the best ways of knowing whether one is capable of some performance is by actually attempting it. Repeated success at an activity results in high self-efficacy, while failures will lower self-efficacy, unless lack of effort or adverse circumstances are involved (Bandura, 1977). Once a strong sense of efficacy (or inefficacy) is established, it perhaps generalise to similar tasks and situations. This is because according to Bandura (1997), sometimes, a learner does not have to directly perform a task to gain efficacy information, but by watching others succeed on a task can raise his/her own sense of efficacy, especially if the person perceives himself/herself to be similar to those observed. A learner may think that "if he can do it, why can't I?". By the same token, observing others who are similar to us failed despite high effort lowers our efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Thus, it is important for teachers to encourage interaction and cooperation among learners in class, so that they can see how others work and at the same time emulate the way their friends work.

The importance of analysing writing self-efficacy

Bandura's theory of perceived self-efficacy overall predicts that a child's self-perception of writing self-efficacy will affect his/her subsequent writing growth. It means that an individual who holds positive writer self-efficacy will perhaps have the strength to continue writing despite all the challenges, persevere and willing to maximize their effort to achieve the goal. Thus, understanding why a learner perceives inability to perform or achieve will give evidence to understanding how to correct writing problems. In this study, it may help to contribute to understanding the importance of teacher's assistance that might affect the learners' writing self-efficacy and writing skills in English. Therefore, it is hoped that a connection can be established by having a detailed analysis of how teacher's assistance affect the rural learners' writing skills and writing self-efficacy. It is also hoped that information obtained from the writing self-efficacy scale can be useful for monitoring individual learners.

The scale may be able to assist teachers to identify learners whose self-efficacy are either initially below the norm or who do not respond positively as a result of writing instructions. In addition, by having writing self-efficacy analysis, it might enable the researcher to describe what possible learners' writing self-perceptions that the teacher is unaware of. Furthermore, the information on teacher's assistance and writing self-efficacy will be useful to teachers in helping them to select suitable instructional approaches and learning materials for the learners. This will help the teachers to modify current classroom learning environment to address areas of need in the learners' writing self-efficacy and become more aware of the indirect cues that they send to learners regarding their writing performance. According to Stipek (1993, p.162), learners' answers to questions on their perception of their ability to succeed in school tasks can help explain maladaptive (e.g. not trying, giving up easily) behaviour and can help teachers to structure the curriculum and assignments in ways that maximize learners' self-confidence. Thus, it is useful to ask learners how difficult they find the tasks are or whether they believe that they are able to complete the tasks.

II. METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study is to investigate the consistency between the level of Universiti Putra Malaysia learners' writing self-efficacy and their writing performance. Specifically, it tries to look at the dependency of these two variables by looking at the distribution of the marks among the three groups of learners. These groups were determined

based on the writing self-efficacy scores. Learners' writing self-efficacy was evaluated using the writing self-efficacy scale adapted from Bottomley, Henk and Melnick (1998). Both provided the researcher with the descriptive statistics such as mean and overall scores which described the level of the learners' writing self-efficacy. Meanwhile, the dependency of the two variables was calculated using Chi square test for independence, and ratio patterns of the two variables were discussed using the scatterplot.

The process in collecting data

One class consisted of 33 students from final year of BA (English) class was asked to conduct a self-appraisal for their writing self-efficacy at the beginning of the semester. The instrument was adapted and altered based on the writing self-efficacy scale used by Bottomley, Henk and Melnick (1997). The 37 items on the writing self-efficacy scale analyze how confident the students feel about their writing abilities; the aspects of writing for self-evaluation on the scale include ideas and content, organization, paragraph formatting, voice and tone, word choice, sentence fluency and conventions. Furthermore, the questionnaire assesses the learners' confidence level on the Likert scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree, as Pajares (2003, p. 144) emphasized that "since neither a Likert-type scale nor a 0-100 scale is more difficult or longer than the other, using any of the format that adds predictive utility and correspond to the outcome being measured are especially warranted". Based on the result obtained, three groups of learners were identified namely the highest self-efficacy writer, the average self-efficacy writer and the lowest self-efficacy writer. These groups then were given three different written assignments to be assessed throughout the semester.

III. DATA AND SYNTHESIS

From a broader view, the cross tabulation table generated from SPSS 21 portrayed that there was a certain pattern that could be generalized as shown below;

TABLE 1.
CROSS TABULATION OF THE MARKS AMONG THE THREE GROUPS OF WRITERS

			Final score category		
			Essay 1	Essay 2	Essay 3
WSE Score Category	Group 1	Count	1	4	10
		Expected Count	1.4	4.1	9.5
	Group 2	Count	1	3	10
		Expected Count	1.3	3.8	8.9
	Group 3	Count	1	2	1
		Expected Count	0.4	1.1	2.5
Total		Count	3	9	21
		Expected Count	3.0	9.0	21.0

Based on the table 1.0, it could be seen that for students from group 1 (low self-efficacy writers), expected frequency was somewhat slightly greater than the observed frequency in Essay 1 and 2, and slightly lower for Essay 3. This was also similar for students in Group 2 (average self-efficacy writers) where the expected frequency was somewhat greater than the observed frequency in Essay 1 and 2, but slightly lower for Essay 3. This was somehow different for group 3 (high self-efficacy writer) where the observed frequency for Essay 1 and 2 were greater than expected frequency, and fewer than expected frequency in Essay 3. This variation might lead to the assumption that there was slight association between the variables given the slight differences between the observed frequency and expected frequency. Thus, Chi-square test for independence between writing skills and writing self-efficacy was conducted. Two hypotheses were formed namely;

H_o – Writing skills performance is independent on writing self-efficacy

H_A – Writing skills performance is dependent on writing self-efficacy

TABLE 2.
CHI-SQUARE TESTS

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.298[a]	4	.509
Likelihood Ratio	3.090	4	.543
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.324	1	.250
N of Valid Cases	33		

a. 7 cells (77.8%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .36.

Based on Table 2.0, all expected cell frequencies were lesser than five. Thus, hypothesis null was rejected and it implied that writing skills performance was actually dependent on writing self-efficacy, $X^2(1) = 3.298$, *p*= .509. The strength of this dependence could be shown as in Table 3.0 below;

TABLE 3.
SYMMETRIC MEASURES

		Value	Approx. Sig.
	Phi	.316	.509
Nominal by Nominal	Cramer's V	.224	.509
	Contingency Coefficient	.301	.509
N of Valid Cases		33	

Table 3.0 showed that Cramer's V value was .224 while the contingency coefficient value was .301. Based on Guilford's rule of strength of relationship, this indicated that there was a low relationship between writing skills performance and writing self-efficacy, φ = 0.316, p = .509. A visual representation of the data association and distribution could be portrayed as below;
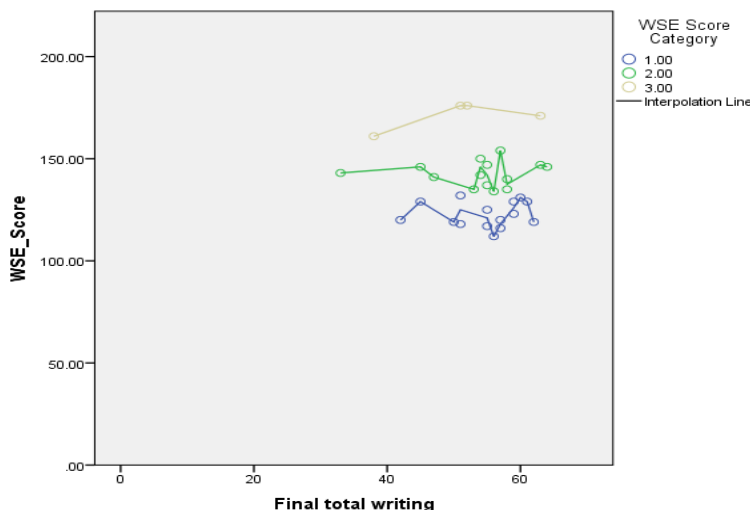

Table 4.0 Scatterplot of marks

Scatter plot above showed the distribution of marks among the three groups of writers namely the high self-efficacy writers (Group 3), average self-efficacy writers (Group 2) and low self-efficacy writers (Group 1). The lowest line, which ranged below 150 WSE score represented the low self-efficacy writers group, while the middle line that was within the range of 150 WSE score represented the average self-efficacy writers. Finally, the top line which ranged between 150 to 200 WSE scores represented the high self-efficacy writers. Generally, it could be seen that the ratio whether the high self-efficacy scores tallied with the high scores in writing performance was actually depending on the self-efficacy categories (high, average and low).

In the high self-efficacy category, it could be seen that not many students were in the range of high self-efficacy level. The diagram showed that the higher scores that the students' obtained for self-efficacy, the higher the marks obtained for their writing skills. Only one student in high self-efficacy category indicated a slight drop in self-efficacy level but increased in terms of the writing scores. This implied that when these students perceived their writing as very competent, it was thus depicted in their writing performance where marks also increased correspondingly. However, there was a different pattern in the writing scores plot among the average self-efficacy writers. The study showed that the lower the marks in self-efficacy, the higher the marks were in terms of writing performance. This result also contradicted the low self-efficacy writers group. In the low self-efficacy writers group, the students writing scores increased when their self-efficacy increased at the same time. The variety of scores distribution among the three groups perhaps explained the variety of expected and observed frequency as discussed earlier.

IV. DISCUSSION

In this study, the participants' writing performance shows dependent on the participants' ability perception as from the WSE Scale findings show. This supports Pajares, Johnson and Usher's (2007) view that the manner in which the learners engage text is mediated by the interpretations learners make about the skills they possess. In conclusion, both findings from the learners' writing proficiency level and writing self-efficacy level have given a new perspective in the teaching of writing and also raised a few questions. Firstly, it seems that the participants' performance depend on the topic discussed. This can be seen from the various frequency of expected and observed frequency for essay 1 to 3. It perhaps depends on whether the topic relates to their *sociocultural* or requires them to write in vacuum namely devoid of any social attachments or factors. Thus it can be implied that this factor determines how the participants in this study actually wrote. Secondly, the writing performance among the three groups of writers also shows that one was able to

perform well as the self-efficacy getting higher, but not for the average self-efficacy writers. This brings into the discussion that self-efficacy is actually weak independent variable and perhaps cannot be generalized to all types of writing or genre. This is because though the average self-efficacy writers scored high in self-efficacy, their marks for writing nevertheless not necessarily will increase. Both conditions discuss above imply that social and cognitive are actually closely related in developing writers' skills in writing. Here, the sociocultural and socio-cognitive theories can make two sorts of contributions to a child's intellectual development. First, through sociocultural, the child acquires much of the content of his/her thinking, that is, his/her cognitive. Second, the surrounding culture provides him/her with the processes or means of his/her thinking which Vygotsky calls the "tools of intellectual adaptation". In conclusion, the combination of the sociocultural and cognitive theories implies that culture teaches children both what to think and how to think.

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