

## **The Correlation between Law College Students' Self-Efficacy and their Writing Achievement in English Language**

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### **Abstract :**

There is no doubt that writing is one of the most difficult skills for second language learners to master, in particular, for law college students who learn English for legal purposes. Acquiring writing skills that are highly complex is not the only factor which makes students achieve success in writing. There are other factors which influence students' outcome achievement like having confidence in their own capabilities known as self-efficacy beliefs. The construct of self-efficacy has received increasing attention and has been proved to have a significant positive correlation with writing achievement. Consequently, students who have high self-efficacy in their own writing skills, are expected to accomplish writing tasks successfully, on the other hand, those who show low self-efficacy are expected to fail even before they start writing.

The aims of this study are:

1. Investigating the correlation between law college students self-efficacy and their writing achievement in English language.
2. Identifying the difference in gender between male and female law students as for self-efficacy and achievement.
3. Identifying Law students' performance in the self-efficacy scale.

To achieve the aims of the study, the following hypotheses have been posed:

1. There is a positive correlation between law college students' self-efficacy and their writing achievement in English language.
2. There is a difference in gender between male and female law students as for self-efficacy and achievement.
3. Law college students have self-efficacy in their writing capabilities.

To achieve the aims of the study and verify the hypotheses, a sample of 40 students are randomly chosen from forth stage, law department, college of law and political sciences, Diyala university, in addition to 30 students who represent the pilot study. The students are asked to answer the self-efficacy scale for writing and to be compared with their writing achievement. By using certain statistical methods, such as t-test formula, Pearson correlation coefficient, Alpha Cronbach correlation coefficient, and spss, the following results have been obtained:

1. The computed  $r$  (0.929) is higher than the table one (0.25) at a degree of freedom of (38), which means that the correlation is positively significant.

2. Concerning the difference between male and female law students as for self-efficacy beliefs and writing achievement, it has been revealed that the computed t-value(1.43) is lower than the table one (1.68) at a level of significance of (0.05) and degree of freedom of (38), accordingly, the difference is not significant.

3. Since the mean score of students' self-efficacy is (45.43) which is higher than the theoretical mean (30), it means that law students have acceptable degree of self-efficacy beliefs in their writing capabilities.

According to the study results above, the following conclusions can be put forwards:

1. There is a significant positive correlation between law students' self-efficacy and their achievement in writing.
2. There is no significant difference as for self- efficacy and writing achievement between male and female students.
3. When comparing the mean score of self-efficacy grades with the theoretical mean, it shows that law students have efficacy beliefs in their writing capabilities.

العلاقة بين ثقة طلبة كلية القانون بقدراتهم في الكتابة في اللغة الانكليزية وبين ادائهم

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الكلمات المفتاحية: الثقة بالقدرات الذاتية، المصطلحات القانونية الانكليزية، التحصيل في الكتابة

الخلاصة :

ان الكتابة في اللغة الانكليزية بلا شك تعد واحدة من اصعب المهارات لمتعلمي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة ثانية او اجنبية وخاصة لطلبة القانون اللذين يدرسون اللغة الانكليزية لأغراض قانونية. ان اكتساب مهارات الكتابة المعقدة هي

ليست العامل الوحيد في نجاح الطلبة في الكتابة اذ ان هناك عوامل اخرى ذات تأثير ايجابي في التحصيل النهائي مثل عامل ثقة الطلبة بقدراتهم ومهاراتهم في الكتابة باللغة الانكليزية. فقد اكتسب هذا المفهوم اهتماما بالغاً اذ اكدت الدراسات على وجود علاقة ايجابية بين هذا العامل والتحصيل ،و بالتالي فان الطلبة اللذين يتمتعون بثقة عالية بقدراتهم بالكتابة هم قادرون على انجاز مهامهم بنجاح، اما الطلبة اللذين يظهرون ثقة اقل فانهم يفشلون احيانا قبل البدء بالكتابة.  
تهدف هذه الدراسة الى:

١. التحقق من العلاقة بين عامل ثقة طلبة كلية القانون بقدراتهم بالكتابة باللغة الانكليزية وبين ادائهم.

٢. تعيين الفرق في الاداء بين الطلبة الذكور والاناث.

٣. معرفة اداء الطلبة في مقياس الثقة بالقدرات الذاتية.

اما فرضيات البحث فهي:

١. هناك علاقة ايجابية بين عامل ثقة الطلبة بقدراتهم في الكتابة وبين ادائهم.

٢. هناك فرق في الاداء بين الطلبة الذكور و الاناث.

٣. يتمتع طلبة القانون بثقة بقدراتهم في الكتابة في اللغة الانكليزية.

لغرض تحقيق اهداف البحث واثبات الفرضيات، تم اختيار (٤٠) طالبا من طلبة المرحلة الرابعة، كلية القانون، جامعة ديالى كعينة للبحث. و باستعمال الوسائل الاحصائية المناسبة، تم التوصل للنتائج التالية:

١. هناك علاقة ايجابية بين ثقة طلبة القانون بقدراتهم في الكتابة وبين ادائهم. اذ ان قيمة الرء المحسوبة (٠،٩٢٩) اعلى من الجدولية (٠،٢٥).

٢. عدم وجود فرق كبير في الاداء بين الطلبة الذكور والاناث. اذ ان قيمة التاء المحسوبة (١،٤٣) اقل من الجدولية (١،٦٨).

٣. ان الوسط الحسابي لعامل ثقة الطلبة بقدراتهم (٤٥،٤٣) هو اعلى من الوسط الافتراضي(٣٠) مما يدل على تمتع الطلبة بثقة بقدراتهم ومهاراتهم في الكتابة.

وقد تم التوصل للاستنتاجات التالية في ضوء نتائج البحث:

١. هناك علاقة ايجابية بين ثقة الطلبة بقدراتهم في الكتابة وبين ادائهم.

٢. الفرق بين اداء الطلبة الذكور والاناث غير دال معنويا.

٣. يتمتع طلبة القانون الى حد ما بالثقة بقدراتهم الذاتية بالكتابة باللغة الانكليزية.

## **1.Introduction**

### **1.1 Problem of the study**

There are many good real life reasons for getting students to write, both in and outside the class. They would need to write things like emails, letters and reports etc.( Harmer, 2007: 112). As far as law college students are concerned, who study English for legal purposes, they need to learn to write on legal issues in English like drafting and writing legal documents, advocacy, etc. particularly because English is prominently the language of international practice(Codruta, 2012: 832-833).

Writing legal English imposes difficulties for law students since legal English lexis includes words which their origin is Latin, French, and Anglo-Saxon reflected throughout contemporary usage(Ibid:833). Moreover, students who are learning to write in a new language with different system would encounter feelings of being less confident and less self-assured which would affect their performance( Richards & Renandya, 2002: 301). These self-beliefs components have been proved to be playing a role in success and achievement, in addition, how learners behave can often be better predicted by the beliefs they hold about their capabilities, which are known as self-efficacy beliefs, that by what they are actually capable of accomplishing. Accordingly, students who are confident in their writing capabilities anticipate high marks on writing tasks, and conversely, those who doubt their writing capabilities envision low marks before they even began to write( Pajares & Schunk, 2001:239).

Self-efficacy has been recently viewed as a significant construct underlying successful writing and cognitive development (Schmidt & Alexander, 2012: 1) and also critical

component to increase learners willingness to persist when tasks become difficult as well as increasing other motivation construct and various writing outcomes( Pajares, 2003:141).

## **1.2 Aims of the Study**

This study aims at:

1. Investigating the correlation between law college students self-efficacy and their writing achievement in English language.
2. Identifying the difference in gender between male and female law students as for self-efficacy and achievement.
3. Identifying Law students' performance in the self-efficacy scale.

## **1.3 Hypotheses**

It is hypothesized that:

1. There is a positive correlation between law college students' self-efficacy and their writing achievement in English language.
2. There is a difference in gender between male and female law students as for self-efficacy and achievement.
3. Law college students have self-efficacy in their writing capabilities.

## **1.4 Limits of the Study**

Field of the study: the study is limited to the correlation between self-efficacy and writing achievement.

Time: It is limited to the academic year (2014-2015)

Place: the study is applied to law college students, college of law and political sciences, Diyala University.

## **1.5 Methodology**

Participants: the participants are 40 law college students who study English for legal purposes.

Procedures: the procedures to be followed are:

1. Conducting for data analysis, an achievement test and a questionnaire,
2. Using certain methods to statistically analyze and tabulate the results,
3. Analyzing the results obtained, and
4. Drawing conclusions and presenting recommendations.

## **1.6 The Significance of the Study**

This study is of a great significance for:

1. Law students who study English for legal purposes to highlight the importance of self-efficacy beliefs in achieving better writing outcomes and academic goals set for themselves.
2. English language teachers to increase their students self-efficacy and raise awareness of its impact on their academic success whether in writing achievement or learning in general.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Conception of Self-efficacy Beliefs**

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there has been an increasing interest in self-beliefs and their correlation with human behavior achievement, most importantly, in the academic success (Pajares & Schunk, 2001:239-266). It has been claimed that no successful cognitive or affective activity can be carried out without some degree of self-beliefs in the learners capabilities for that activity (Brown, 1987:101). These self-beliefs enable them to exercise a measure of control over their

thoughts, feelings and actions. These beliefs are referred to as self-efficacy beliefs which is defined by Bandura(1994:71-81) as "the beliefs that people have about their capabilities to produce a designated level of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" or defined as "an individuals' beliefs of being capable of performing necessary behavior to perform a task successfully"(Bandura, 2001, as cited in Schmidt & Alexander, 2012: 1).

Self-efficacy is hypothesized to have diverse effects in classroom achievement. It can influence achievement settings as choice of activities so that students with high self-efficacy belief for learning will expend much effort and persistence and participate more eagerly than those with low sense of self-efficacy(schunk, 1985: 1).

## **2.2 Sources of Self Efficacy Beliefs**

There are four main sources of self-efficacy from which the beliefs are developed: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasions, and physiological states.

Mastery experience is considered the most effective way of creating a strong sense of self-efficacy, that is, success builds a strong belief in one's personal efficacy while, on the other hand, failure undermines it, especially if it occurs before a sense of efficacy, is firmly established(Bandura, 1994: 71-81).

The second source of self-efficacy is the vicarious experience individual undergo when he observes others performing tasks. It includes the social comparisons which can be a powerful influence on developing self-efficacy(Pajares, 2003: 140). Teachers often provide social comparison which would help to promote a sense of efficacy for learning

if students believe that they can learn as well as their peers( Shunk,1985: 10).

Individuals also create and develop their self-efficacy as a result of the social messages they receive from others. Though it is weaker than the other previous sources, but it can play an important role. Most adults can recall something that was said to them during their childhood that had a profound effect on their confidence throughout the rest of their life(Pajares, 2002: 1).

Mood also affects people's judgments of their personal efficacy. Positive mood enhances perceived self-efficacy unlike the despondent mood which diminishes it, consequently, affecting negatively on their performance(Bandura, 1994:71-81).

### **2.3 Correlation Between Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Writing Achievement**

There is no doubt that writing is one of the most difficult skills for second language learners to master since it requires not only generating and organizing ideas, but translating these ideas into readable text. The difficulty lies in the fact that writing includes highly complex skills like higher levels of planning and organizing as well as lower level skills of spelling, punctuation, word choice ,etc.(Richards & Renandya, 2002: 303). But acquiring these skills is correlated with other important constructs underlying successful writing and cognitive development, namely, self-efficacy constructs.

It has been confirmed that students' confidence in their writing skills is related to both writing competence and academic motivation variables such as writing self-concepts, writing apprehension, achievement goals, and perceived value

of writing(Pajares, et al,2001:1). Moreover, students with high self-efficacy for writing are conceptualized to be students with self-capabilities to effectively carry out writing tasks and also have strengths in meta-cognitive processes that regulate the writing process such as goal setting, self-talk, and self-monitoring(Mills, 2010:10). Additionally, they are characterized to be more enthusiastic about writing exercises and able to encounter problems in writing considering the problems as challenges rather than difficulties( Balci, 2013:540).

### **3. Procedures**

#### **3.1 Sample of the Study**

The kind of the sample adopted in the study is a random sample,i.e, the sample in which every member of the population has an equal and an independent chance of being selected (Richards & Schmidt, 2002: 465). Forth law college students represent the sample of the study which includes 40 students( 20 male and 20 female) who study English for four years for legal purposes. The sample participated in both the questionnaire through which they have to express their judgments on their writing capabilities and to be compared with their writing achievement in the academic year (2014-2015).

#### **3.2 Data Collection Instruments**

In order to achieve the aims of the study, two main instruments have been constructed, self-efficacy scale for writing and an achievement test.

As far as self-efficacy scale is concerned, a questionnaire of 15 items has been constructed to assess law students'

capabilities in legal writing. Some of the items of the scale are adopted from (Schmidt & Alexandar, 2012) and the others are constructed by the researcher which are appropriate to the field of the study. The scale is a likert type and the items are positively oriented using 'I can' statements. It provides the students with a rating scale ranges from (1not at all true) to (4 exactly true). Instruction about how to answer the questionnaire were given and the time needed for answering was 40 minutes.(see Appendix A)

The other data collection instrument is the achievement test. In the achievement test, which should be related to classroom lessons, units and are limited to a particular material covered in a curriculum in a particular time frame(Brown, 1987: 225), law students are asked to write in one of the prompts given in the test which are all assessing students, capabilities to write composition about different legal topics in the field of their specialization. Instructions were given in advance and the time needed for the accomplishing the test was 45 minutes.(See Appendix B)

### **3.3 Reliability**

In order to measure the degree to which the items of the self-efficacy scale are consistent, homogeneous, or equivalent with each other, Cronbach Alpha coefficient correlation is used(Richards & Schmidt, 2002:268). The reliability is (0.85) which shows high internal consistency, as shown in table (1). As far as the achievement test is concerned, scorer reliability, the consistency of scoring by two or more scores( Brown, 1987: 221), was measured. A sample of( 30) students were randomly chosen from the fourth stage. The test papers were

scored twice by two scorers and the result have shown acceptable reliability r (0.80).

**Table (1)**

**Reliability & Internal Consistency of Self-Efficacy Items**

Self-Efficacy Items	Computed r	Table r	Significance
1	0.602	0.25	positively Significant
2	0.613		
3	0.404		
4	0.500		
5	0.743		
6	0.418		
7	0.782		
8	0.598		
9	0.712		
10	0.509		
11	0.360		
12	0.658		
13	0.601		
14	0.654		
15	0.465		

**3.4 Validity**

Validity is" the extent to which a test does what it is intended to do"(Corder, 1993: 365).

In order to achieve face validity, which is the degree to which a test appears to measure the knowledge or abilities it claims to measure, based on the subjective judgment of an observer(Richards & Schmidt, 2002:197), the self-efficacy scale and the achievement test were exposed to a jury of experts in the field of linguistics and ELT to show their remarks and suggestions concerning the appropriateness of the data instruments(see Appendix c). content validity is also

achieved since the items of the self-efficacy scale intend to assess students' self-beliefs in their writing capabilities. Additionally, the achievement test assesses students' abilities to write composition in legal issues.

### **3.5 Final Application**

After checking reliability and validity, the self-efficacy scale for writing and the achievement test were applied to the sample assigned( 20 male and 20 female). In the self-efficacy scale, students were asked to choose one of four options for each item which express the degree to which they have confidence in their writing capabilities. The time needed for answering the items is 40 minutes. In the achievement test, on the other hand, students were asked to write in one of the prompts given in the test. The time required was 45 minutes.

### **3.6 Scoring Scheme**

The scores of the test are considered very essential for making decisions about the study sample, accordingly the scheme followed to arrive at these scores is a crucial part of the measurement process( Bachman & Palmer, 1996:193). The scheme followed in the self-efficacy scale is to give marks ranging from(1 not at all true, to 4 exactly true) and the sum score ranges from ( 15- 60).(Schmidt & Alexander,2012: 1;Pajares, 2002: 1). (See Appendix d)

In order to make the scoring scheme for the achievement test more objective, a marking scheme of a range of different items was followed. The sum score range from ( 6-30).(Harmer, 2007;172-173).( See Appendix E)

## 4. Data Analysis

### 4.1 Statistical Analysis of the Correlation between Self-efficacy Scale and Achievement Test

The students responses in the self-efficacy scale and their performance in the achievement test were analyzed. As far as the first aim is concerned, Pearson correlation coefficient is used to find out if there is a relation between students' self-efficacy and writing achievement. As shown in the table below, the computed  $r(0.929)$  is higher than the table one(0.25) at a degree of freedom (38) which means that the correlation is positively significant and the first hypothesis is verified.

**Table (2)**  
**Statistical Analysis of Students' Performance in both the Self-efficacy Scale and the Achievement Test**

variables	Sample size	Theoretical Mean	Computed mean	S.D	Computed r	Table r	D. F	Kind of Significance
Self-efficacy	40	30	45.43	7.06	0,929	0.25	38	Positively significant
achievement		15	21.90	2.92				

### 4.2 Statistical Analysis of Male and Female Students' Performance in the Self-Efficacy Scale and Achievement Test

To achieve the second aim of the study, students' performance were assessed independently by using t-test formula for two independent samples to find out if there is significant difference in performance between male and female students. As shown in the table below, the computed t-value(1.43) is lower than the table one(1.68) at a level of significance (0.05) and a degree of freedom (38), accordingly, the difference is not significant. Moreover, when comparing the mean score of the male students with the one of the female students in the self-efficacy scale, it shows that the difference is not significant.

**Table (3)**  
**Statistical analysis of male and female students' performance in the achievement test to show the difference in gender**

Gender	Sample Size	Mean Score	S.D	Computed t	Table t	Significance
Female	20	21.25	3.18	1.43	1.68	Not significant
Male	20	22.25	2.54			

**Table (4)**  
**Mean scores and S.D of students' performance in the self-efficacy scale**

Variable	Gender	Mean Score	S.D	Difference
Self-Efficacy	Male	47.05	6.70	Not significant
	Female	43.80	7.19	

### **4.3 Statistical Analysis of Students' Performance in the Self-Efficacy Scale**

As shown in table (1), the computed mean of the self-efficacy scale is (45.43), while the theoretical mean is (30) which means that law students have a confidence in their writing capabilities. None of them have got a score less than (30) in the self-efficacy questionnaire, accordingly, the third hypothesis is verified(see table 5) .

**Table(5)**  
**Students' Performance in the Self-Efficacy Scale**

Students No.female	Self- efficacy grade	Students No.male	Self- efficacy grade
1	32	21	51
2	55	22	54
3	54	23	57
4	48	24	45
5	44	25	50
6	42	26	53
7	43	27	40
8	46	28	57
9	52	29	48
10	39	30	37
11	40	31	51
12	48	32	44
13	38	33	32
14	53	34	43
15	34	35	52
16	45	36	39
17	50	37	45
18	45	38	45
19	37	39	46
20	31	40	52
<b>Out of</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>Out of</b>	<b>60</b>

## **5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusions**

The data analysis calculated have revealed the following conclusions:

1. There is a significant positive correlation between law students' self-efficacy and their achievement in writing.

2. There is no significant difference as for self- efficacy and writing achievement between male and female students.
3. When comparing the mean score of self-efficacy grades with the theoretical mean, it shows that law students have efficacy beliefs in their writing capabilities.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

On the basis of the study results, the following recommendations can be put forward:

1. Since the study results have shown a positive correlation between self-efficacy beliefs and writing achievements, it is important to raise English language teachers and students' awareness to the importance of increasing confidence in self-capabilities.
2. Students can develop their self-efficacy through improving mastery experience. Successful experience lead to greater feeling of self-efficacy.
3. English language teachers can increase their students' self-efficacy through making a comparison with successful students. Observing other students succeed will increase their belief that that they can achieve similar result.
4. Teachers can also use verbal persuasions to raise students' confidence in their writing skills by encouraging and convincing them that they can perform well in tasks, accordingly, they will feel more capable of achieving tasks.
5. It is important for students to realize that there are some physiological states which may develop a weak sense of self-efficacy and influence how they feel about their capabilities such as mood, stress etc. For this reason, being able to diminish and control anxiety may have a positive impact on self- efficacy beliefs.

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**Appendices**  
**Appendix (A)**

**The Self-Efficacy Scale for Writing**

Choose one of the four options which reflects your writing self-efficacy.

Items	Not at all true	Hardly true	Moderately true	Exactly true
1.during my years of studying English for legal purposes, I have learned a variety of legal terms which I can use effectively in writing legal issues.				
2.in spite of the complexity of legal terms, I can write compositions about different legal topics like goods sale, international law, contracts, administrative courts etc.				
3.I can invest a great deal of effort and time in writing legal issues.				
4.I can articulate my strength and challenges in writing tasks.				
5.I can incorporate evidence and examples to support important points in my writing.				
6.when I read a rough draft, I can identify gaps when they are present in my written piece.				
7. I can attribute my success on writing to my writing abilities and skills more than to luck or external factors.				

8. Once I have completed a draft, I can eliminate both small and large sections that are no longer necessary.				
9. I can write on legal topics without experiencing overwhelming feelings of fear or stress.				
10. even when writing tasks are difficult, I am confident I can perform quite well.				
11. I can find and correct my grammatical errors.				
12. I can learn from my instructor new strategies that promote my development and success in legal writing.				
13. I can write on different topics with little punctuation and spelling mistakes.				
14. I can accomplish writing tasks that are worthy of praise and a good grade.				
15. once I face problems in writing I am confident I can find solutions.				

**Appendix (B)**  
**The Achievement Test**

Write about one of the following prompts:

- the role of the international organization in maintenance of international peace and security.
- purpose of insurance contracts.
- the advocacy profession in your country.
- the composition of the consultative council in your country.

Instructions:

Make sure your composition has the following:

- A clear, focused central idea
- Appropriate word choice
- A logical organization( beginning, middle, end)
- correct spelling and punctuation
- correct grammar
- complete sentences

**Appendix (C)**

**Names of Jury Members**

- Prof. Khaleel Ismael, Ph.D.
- Prof. Sami Al-Maamori. Ph.D.
- Inst. Liqaa Habeeb, Ph.D.
- Inst. Ghazwan Adnan ,Ph.D.
- Asst. Inst. Rafal Ghazi, MA

**Appendix (D)**

**Marking Scheme of the Self-Efficacy Scale**

Items	Not at all true (1mark)	Hardly true (2mark)	Moderately true (3mark)	Exactly true (4mark)
1.during my years of studying English for legal purposes, I have learned a variety of legal terms which I can use effectively in writing legal issues.				
2.in spite of the complexity of legal terms, I can write compositions about different legal topics like goods sale, international law, contracts, administrative courts etc.				
3.I can invest a great deal of effort and time in writing				

legal issues.				
4.I can articulate my strength and challenges in writing tasks.				
5.I can incorporate evidence and examples to support important points in my writing.				
6.when I read a rough draft, I can identify gaps when they are present in my written piece.				
7. I can attribute my success on writing to my writing abilities and skills more than to luck or external factors.				
8. Once I have completed a draft, I can eliminate both small and large sections that are no longer necessary.				
9. I can write on legal topics without experiencing overwhelming feelings of fear or stress.				
10.even when writing tasks are difficult , I am confident I can perform quite well.				
11.I can find and correct my grammatical errors.				
12.I can learn from my instructor new strategies that promote my development and success in legal writing.				
13.i can write on different topics with little punctuation and spelling mistakes.				
14.I can accomplish writing				

tasks that are worthy of praise and a good grade.				
15. once I face problems in writing I am confident I can find solutions.				

### **Appendix (E)**

#### **Harmer's Marking Scheme of the Writing Tasks**

	1weak	2developing	3satisfactory	4strong	5exemplary
Clear focused ideas					
Appropriate word choice					
Logical organization					
Correct spelling and punctuation					
Correct grammar					
Complete sentences					