



## **Writing Self-Efficacy of International Students Learning Turkish as a Second Language**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this study is to investigate writing self-efficacy of international students majoring at Inonu University. Ninety-three participants were from seventeen countries and at the time of the study they had completed a one year Turkish language course before proceeding with their majors. In order to measure the writing self-efficacy of the participants, a scale developed by Buyukikiz (2012) was employed. The findings of the study suggest that the participants have little difficulties in expressing their ideas in the written form. The fact that they scored less in lower level skills suggests that they have more difficulties with the grammar and spelling of Turkish. This study illustrates that since Turkish is an agglutinating language, more attention should be paid to the spelling and grammar rules in Turkish writing courses.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

When we talk about writing self-efficacy, we believe it is appropriate to give a definition of self-efficacy, and then we will provide a definition of writing self-efficacy. Maddux and Volkmann (2010) define self-efficacy as ‘one’s confidence in one’s ability to execute the behavior in question under the conditions in question—that is, one’s confidence in one’s ability to implement plans and strategies’ (p. 316). Then, writing self-efficacy can briefly be explained as one’s confidence in one’s ability to compose various types of written texts.

While many language educators and lay people believe that speaking and listening are the most difficult skills to develop due to the ear factor involved in both skills, Richards and Renandya (2002) argue that due to the difficulty of not only generating and organizing ideas, but also in translating these ideas into readable text, writing is the most difficult skill for L2 learners to master. In addition to these difficulties, the skills involved in writing are highly complex because L2 writers have to pay attention to higher level skills of planning and organizing as well as lower level skills of spelling, punctuation, word choice, and so on. When the learners have weak language proficiency, as is the case in our study, the difficulty is observed more often.

What makes writing so difficult is not only the complex process involved, but also the way this skill is improved: while speaking and listening are acquired, reading and writing are learned skills (Sahin, 2010). Writing, being the only productive learned skill, proves to be highly challenging for native speakers and this challenge becomes more daunting when the issue is writing in a second language.

So what are the component sub skills of writing that makes it so difficult? In the second paragraph we classified two types of writing skills; lower level skills and higher level skills. Higher level skills are prewriting which also encompasses free writing, clustering and brain storming, drafting, composing, revising and editing; on the other hand lower level skills are grammar, mechanics (appropriate use of capital letters, punctuation, format of the paper, etc.) and spelling.

Another factor which renders writing more difficult than other skills is the fact that writing is more of an individual effort than speaking, and it is more rule bound and therefore error-prone. The burden of understanding the message in spoken communication is shared by the listener(s); the speaker may have defaults in his-her pronunciation, choice of word, grammar and can use various structures in his/her speech; on the other hand the writer is expected to produce sentences with correct grammar and spelling, and can use limited structures in his/her writing (Bowen, Madsen and Hilferty, 1985).

When we have a look at the history of language teaching methodology, we see that with the advent of communicative methods, writing has been given less priority than other skills such as listening and speaking because in our age interaction and communication are considered to be the primary functions of language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

### **RELATED RESEARCH**

Since writing is one of the most important skills for university students and for researchers conducting graduate studies and trying to get published, several studies have been carried out with the aim of developing the writing skills of tertiary level students.

Brown (1994) distinguished three major issues in the history of teaching writing: a) process vs. product, b) contrastive rhetoric and c) authenticity. We are going to explain these concepts briefly. While in the past teachers mostly valued the end product of writing, today most of the attention is paid to the process of writing. Regarding authenticity, Brown attracts our attention to how writing style of people from various cultural backgrounds may display differences and suggests us valuing students' native language related rhetorical traditions. Lastly, as teachers we should keep in mind the difference between real writing and display writing; the former is performed when the reader does not know the answers and genuinely wants the information; the latter is performed for the instructor who is also the sole reader of the text for the sake of displaying student's knowledge.

As a response to Brown, Reppen (2002) conducted a study in which she tried to avoid 'the occasional excesses of a process approach to writing instruction' (p. 321), because she argues 'process approach often disregards the importance of written form and, in effect, takes power away from learners, particularly those from different language or culture backgrounds' (p. 321). Reppen offers a new method to writing called 'Genre-Based Approach to Content Writing Instruction' in which the learners produce 'authentic' texts displaying their content knowledge through different writing tasks such as narrative descriptive, persuasive, and expository texts. This new method to writing offer ESL students valuable practice in various school-valued ways of writing while they learn content material and work through steps in the writing process.

So far we have mentioned the studies which investigated teaching writing for the sake of writing; Gordon (2007), however, has a fundamentally different point of view for this issue. She mentions an approach to teaching grammar which holds that grammar lessons are effective when they are integrated with the teaching of writing because;

- a) Written speech is different from oral speech in that it is not spontaneous. When learners write, they can stop and plan their utterances.

- b) Written speech is unlike oral speech in that it contains inherent provisions for monitoring. Unlike speakers, writers have an option of going back to the text that they just produced; they can slowly review the text and edit it for grammatical accuracy.
- c) When implementing writing activities, teachers can utilize scaffolds or models that learners can refer to in level to assure greater grammatical accuracy of their written pieces.

Melanlıoğlu, Taysi and Ozdemir (2012) discussed the use of cartoons to teach Turkish to foreigners: they argue that cartoons could serve various functions from motivating students, to concentrating their attention on the lesson, improving intercultural communication competence and providing topics for reading, writing, and speaking activities.

Since Bandura published his seminal 1977 paper, “Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change”, a great deal of research has been conducted on self-efficacy across various disciplines. However, there are few studies focusing on the teaching of writing to foreign speakers of Turkish and self-efficacy. It is hoped that this study will open new perspectives and supply significant insights for scholars and learners interested in teaching/learning Turkish.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this study, we sought responses to the following questions:

- To what extent do students have difficulty regarding lower level writing skills and higher level writing skills?
- Is there any difference between male and female students’ perceptions of difficulty in terms of lower level and higher level skills?
- Does experience as university students enhance writing self-efficacy of foreigners learning Turkish as a Second Language?

## DATA COLLECTION

### Participants

The volunteer participants in this study consisted of 93 undergraduate students majoring in various departments in Inonu University. The students belong to 17 nationalities (Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Mongolia, Azerbaijan, Palestine, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Germany, Indonesia, Yemen, Syria, Gabon, Poland, Georgia, and Uzbekistan), and at the time of the study all of them had completed a one-year Turkish preparatory course. Fifty-six of them were in the first, twenty-two of them in the second and fifteen of them in the third year of their undergraduate studies. Thus, in terms of experience as university students there were three groups of participants: those with one year of experience, those with two years, and those with three years. The study was conducted during the 2013-2014 Fall term. Information regarding the number of students from each faculty and their gender is presented in Table 1 below:

**Table 1:** Participant Students’ Faculties and Gender

	Gender		Total	%
	Male	Female		
Education	14	17	31	28,83

Law	7	1	8	7,44
Engineering	10	2	12	11,16
Administrative and Economical Sciences	12	2	14	13,02
Medicine	11	3	14	13,02
Theology	4	2	6	5,58
Vocational High School	2	1	3	2,79
Arts and Letters	1	4	5	4,65
Total	61	32	93	100

### Data Collection Tool

A 16-item scale designed to measure 2 dimensions of writing self-efficacy was used in this study. The scale was developed by Buyukikiz (2012), who also tested the validity and reliability of the instrument. All items are answered on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1=disagree to 7=agree. The 16 items of the scale are positive statements involving can-do abilities. In line with the classification of writing skills as lower level skills and higher level skills, the researchers distinguished two dimensions in the scale: while items 1, 2, 3 and 13 address lower level skills, the other twelve items address higher level skills. To give general understanding of the scale, English versions of the first and fifth items of the scale are presented below as examples:

*I can spell all the words in a composition correctly.*

*I can write a composition complying with the introduction body and conclusion plan.*

### DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected for this study were fed into a statistical analysis program known as SPSS 17.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for means and means comparisons. The results emerging from this research are presented in tabular forms. We first tried to find an answer to our first research question and compared the means of lower level skills scores and higher level skills scores.

**Table 2:** T- test result of averages of lower level skills points and higher level skills points

Level Type	N	X	Sd	Df	t	p
Lower Level	93	4.51	1.30			
Higher Level	93	4.92	1.31	92	4.92	.000

$p < .05$

As can be seen in Table 2, the mean of lower level skills is 4.51 and the mean of higher level skills is 4.92. The t-test result of the two means is .000, which suggests a significant difference between the perceived difficulty level of lower level skills and higher level skills. The findings displayed in the table suggest that participants in this study thought they were

more proficient regarding higher level skills. This result may seem paradoxical to the audience because the term “lower” implies less difficult tasks than the term “higher” does. However, when we refer to language typology we understand why lower level writing skills are more difficult for Turkish learners. In terms of morphological typology languages are divided into three broad categories: analytical, isolating, and synthetic. Synthetic languages are also divided into three categories an agglutinating/agglutinative, fusional, polysynthetic. We should, however, warn the audience that although some languages come close to one of the three ideal types, isolating, agglutinating, and fusional, most languages combine elements of all three types to different degrees.

In contrast to an isolating language in which each word consists of only a single morpheme, ‘synthetic’ languages permit more than one morpheme to combine to form a word. In agglutinating languages, the boundaries between the individual morphemes are clear-cut. Turkish is labelled as the classic example of an agglutinating language. When you have a look at Turkish nouns, you could identify which sequence of sounds is the root, which sequence indicates number, and which sequence indicates case (Comrie, 2005).

The morphological typology of the Turkish language offers certain difficulties to learners; however, one of the reasons underlying the higher score in higher level skills is the fact that all around the world students are familiar with the various different composition types and practice them in primary and secondary school. Therefore, students majoring in a foreign country bring with them experience in free writing, clustering and brain storming, drafting, composing, revising and editing.

Having analysed the results of lower level skills and higher level skills, we sought answers to our second research question, that is, we tried to find out if there is any difference between the perceived difficulty of lower level and higher level skills according to gender.

**Table 3:** T-test result of averages lower level skills points according to gender

Gender	N	X	Sd	Df	t	p
Female	32	4.70	1.33	91	1.034	.30
Male	61	4.40	1.27			

$p < .05$

Averages of lower level skills of 32 female and 61 male students participating in the study are presented in Table 3. As can be seen in Table 3, while the mean of lower level skills of female students is 4.70 and the mean of male students is 4.40. The t-test result of the two means is .30, which does not suggest a significant difference between female and male students.

The findings suggest that Turkey’s being an agglutinative language poses almost equal difficulty for females and males. Our second intra dimensional analysis was on the difference between higher level skills points of female and male students.

**Table 4:** T-test result of averages higher level skills points according to gender

Gender	N	X	Sd	Df	t	p
Female	32	5.04	1.36	91	.631	.53
Male	61	4.86	1.30			

$p < .05$

The results displayed in Table 4 display that the mean of higher level skills of female students is 5.04 and the mean of male students is 4.86. The t-test result of the two means is .53, which

again does not suggest a significant difference between points of female and male students. Although there is a significant difference between the points of lower level skills and higher level skills, that is, the two dimensions of writing skills do not display equivalent difficulty for learners of Turkish, this difference disappears when we conduct an intra dimensional analysis.

As we mentioned in the participants section, in the study there were three groups of participants in terms experience: participants were classified into three groups as the group with one year experience, the groups with two years experience and the group with three years experience. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if self-efficacy score of lower level skills was different for groups with different experience time.

**Table 5:** ANOVA Results of lower level skills points according to experience

Source of Variation	Sum Squares	of Df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	,643	2	,321		
Within Groups	154,847	90	1,721	,187	,830
Total	155,489	92			

As seen in Table 5, self-efficacy scores for lower level skills did not differ significantly across the three groups,  $F(2, 90) = .187, p = .830$ . The mean scores of the one-year, two year and three-year experience groups were 4,47, 4,46, and 4,70, respectively.

A one way ANOVA was also conducted to determine if self-efficacy score of higher level skills was different for groups with different experience time.

**Table 6:** ANOVA Results of higher level skills points according to experience

Source of Variation	Sum Squares	of Df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	3,160	2	1,580		
Within Groups	156,911	90	1,743	,906	,408
Total	160,070	92			

When we have a look at Table 6 we see that, self-efficacy scores for higher level skills did not differ significantly across the three groups,  $F(2, 90) = .906, p = .408$ . The mean scores of the one-year, two year and three-year experience groups were 4, 95, 4,64 and 5,23, respectively.

With its findings, this study may have some important implications to Turkish learners. The difficulty of observing agglutinative features in writing is obviously not an easy task, and certainly deserves some suggestions. For instance, learners could be provided with sentence level exercises, and while doing the exercises, they might be instructed to focusing on sequence of sounds in the root, sequence indicating number(s), and sequence indicating case, all of which may bear great benefits for language learners. Additionally, for mastery of conjugation and inflection patterns, in reading classes, instructors can select shorter reading texts. By teaching the roots and affixes of the lexical items to the students, the instructors may get the students to determine root-affix relations and thus raise awareness about these chunks. In addition, Turkish language learning instruction should focus on lower level skills especially at the tertiary education.

Languages are divided into categories in terms of genetics, phonology, word order, morphological typology, syllable structure and thematic structure. This way researchers are able to analyze to what extent certain languages are similar to and different from each other with the expectation that while higher similarity between some languages suggests that speakers of those languages could relatively easily learn each other's language and higher difference suggests that speakers of those language could have relatively more difficulty in learning each other's language. Thus, it seems that in addition to genetic differences and word order differences, differences related with morphological typology are another set of differences between languages and are another set of factors which render a language easy or difficult to learn for speakers of other languages.

### **CONCLUSION**

In this study, we attempted to investigate the perceived writing efficacy of Turkish learners majoring at various faculties of Inonu University. The participants were asked to rate their self-efficacy regarding two main sub-skill of writing: lower level skills and higher level skills.

Although there does not seem to be much difference between the means of scores of lower level skills and higher level skills (the difference between the means of two scores is only .41), this difference was found to be statistically significant. The fact that participants' self-efficacy scores of lower level skills is lower than their higher level skills scores can be interpreted as mechanics of writing in Turkish is more difficult than free writing, clustering and brain storming, drafting, composing, revising and editing.

Besides highlighting differences between lower level skills and higher level skills, the study also reveals that the self-efficacy differences between the two genders or among the experience groups are not significant. The experience gained through the study of target language does not show any significant change in the development of lower level writing self-efficacy; however it might show significant changes in the higher level writing self-efficacy.

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