

EFL Students' Writing Strategies, Self-Efficacy, and Performance in Ethiopia: Exploring Interrelationships

Estrategias de escritura, autoeficacia y desempeño de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera en Etiopía: Explorando sus interrelaciones

Mitiku Tasisa Dinsa¹

Wolkite University, Ethiopia

Esayas Teshome Taddese²

INTI International University, Nilai, Malaysia

¹ mitikultasisa@gmail.com

² eteshome75@gmail.com

Abstract

Effective writing is essential for academic and professional success, especially for students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This study aimed to investigate the correlation between different writing strategies, EFL students' self-efficacy in writing, and their actual writing performance. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed, involving 150 EFL students. Data were collected through questionnaires, IELTS writing tests, and interviews. The results showed a fragile but positive relationship between students' self-efficacy and their use of writing strategies ($r=0.119$). Students who used various strategies, such as planning, revising, and self-monitoring, reported higher confidence in their writing abilities. Additionally, there was a significant but low correlation between the use of writing strategies and writing performance ($r=0.114$). However, writing strategies alone did not significantly predict improvements in writing abilities. These findings suggest that while enhancing students' self-efficacy and encouraging effective writing strategies can potentially improve writing performance, writing strategies alone may not be sufficient. Therefore, English teachers should focus on both training and motivating students to use effective writing strategies to address writing challenges effectively.

Keywords: EFL students, self-efficacy, writing performance, writing strategies

Resumen

La escritura efectiva es fundamental para el éxito académico y profesional, especialmente para los estudiantes que aprenden inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL, por sus siglas en inglés). Este estudio tuvo como objetivo investigar la correlación entre diferentes estrategias de escritura, la autoeficacia de los estudiantes de EFL en la escritura y su desempeño real en esta habilidad. Se empleó un diseño de investigación descriptivo-correlacional con la participación de 150 estudiantes de EFL. Los datos fueron recopilados mediante cuestionarios, pruebas de escritura del IELTS y entrevistas. Los resultados mostraron una relación débil pero positiva entre la autoeficacia de los estudiantes y su uso de estrategias de escritura ($r=0.119$). Los estudiantes que emplearon diversas estrategias, como la planificación, la revisión y la autoevaluación, reportaron una mayor confianza en sus habilidades de escritura. Además, se encontró una correlación significativa pero baja entre el uso de estrategias de escritura y el desempeño en esta habilidad ($r=0.114$). Sin embargo, el uso de estrategias de escritura por sí solo no predijo mejoras significativas en las habilidades de escritura. Estos hallazgos sugieren que, si bien mejorar la autoeficacia de los estudiantes y fomentar el uso de estrategias efectivas de escritura pueden contribuir al rendimiento en esta habilidad, las estrategias de escritura por sí solas pueden no ser suficientes. Por lo tanto, se recomienda que los docentes de inglés se enfoquen tanto en la capacitación como en la motivación de los estudiantes para que utilicen estrategias de escritura efectivas y enfrenten con éxito los desafíos asociados a la escritura.

Palabras clave: estudiantes de EFL, autoeficacia, desempeño en escritura, estrategias de escritura

Resumo

A escrita eficaz é fundamental para o sucesso acadêmico e profissional, especialmente para estudantes que aprendem inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL, na sigla em inglês). Este estudo teve como objetivo investigar a correlação entre diferentes estratégias de escrita, a autoeficácia dos estudantes de EFL na escrita e seu desempenho real nessa habilidade. Foi utilizado um desenho de pesquisa descritivo-correlacional, com a participação de 150 estudantes de EFL. Os dados foram coletados por meio de questionários, testes de escrita do IELTS e entrevistas. Os resultados mostraram uma relação fraca, mas positiva, entre a autoeficácia dos estudantes e o uso de estratégias de escrita ($r=0.119$). Os estudantes que empregaram diversas estratégias, como planejamento, revisão e autoavaliação, relataram maior confiança em suas habilidades de escrita. Além disso, foi encontrada uma correlação significativa, porém baixa, entre o uso de estratégias de escrita e o desempenho nessa habilidade ($r=0.114$). No entanto, o uso de estratégias de escrita, por si só, não previu melhorias significativas nas habilidades de escrita. Esses achados sugerem que, embora melhorar a autoeficácia dos estudantes e incentivar o uso de estratégias eficazes de escrita possam contribuir para o desempenho nessa habilidade, as estratégias de escrita, isoladamente, podem não ser suficientes. Portanto, recomenda-se que os professores de inglês foquem tanto no treinamento quanto na motivação dos estudantes para que utilizem estratégias eficazes de escrita e enfrentem com sucesso os desafios associados à produção textual.

Palavras-chave: estudantes de EFL, autoeficácia, desempenho na escrita, estratégias de escrita

Introduction

For students from non-native English-speaking countries, the ability to write effectively in English is a vital asset. English is the medium of instruction and a prerequisite for achieving higher academic and professional success (Aidinlou & Far, 2014; Chen, 2022; Junianti et al., 2020; Hu, 2022; Raoofi et al., 2017; Sumarsono & Mbato, 2021; Zhou et al., 2022). In Ethiopia, where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), students' proficiency in writing significantly impacts their academic success and future career opportunities. However, a comprehensive understanding of how EFL students' writing strategies, self-efficacy, and writing performance interrelate in the Ethiopian context remains underexplored.

Writing strategies are deliberate actions and techniques that learners use to manage the writing process effectively (Çetinkaya & Bilgan, 2018; Li et al., 2022; Oussou et al., 2024; Raoofi et al., 2014; Sumarsono & Mbato, 2021; Zhou et al., 2022). These strategies include planning (e.g., brainstorming and outlining), drafting, revising, and editing. Effective writing strategies are crucial for producing coherent and well-structured texts (Fajrina et al., 2021; Li, 2022). Studies have shown that the use of effective writing strategies can significantly impact students' writing performance and overall language proficiency (Blasco, 2016; Golparvar & Khafi, 2021; Graham & Perin, 2022; Zhou et al., 2022). Therefore, writing strategies are essential in EFL settings where students often struggle with language proficiency and writing conventions (Demir, 2018; Hu, 2022; Zhang & Zhang, 2024).

Several researchers emphasize the need for tailored writing strategies that address specific challenges faced by EFL learners, such as limited vocabulary and grammar difficulties (Gorpawar & Khafi, 2021; Goy, 2017; Hu, 2022; Raoofi & Maroofi, 2017; Sun & Wang, 2020; Syahrani & Madya, 2019; Teng & Huang, 2019). Despite this, there is a scarcity of research concentrating on the effectiveness of various writing strategies used by Ethiopian EFL students (Gupta & Woldemariam, 2011; Legesse et al., 2021 2020; Mitiku, 2023; Wondim et al., 2024). Understanding which strategies are most effective in this context can provide valuable insights for teachers seeking to enhance students' writing abilities.

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to perform specific tasks successfully. Teng and Wang (2023) claimed that self-efficacy influences motivation, effort, and persistence. In the context of writing, self-efficacy affects students' confidence in their writing abilities and their approach to writing tasks (Aidinlou & Far, 2014). Higher self-efficacy is associated with more significant effort, more effective use of writing strategies, and better writing performance (Junianti et al., 2020; Sun & Wang, 2020; Teng & Wang, 2023).

Writing performance is typically evaluated through the quality of written texts, standardized assessments, and teacher feedback. It is influenced by the strategies students use and their level of self-efficacy. Hu (2022) found that students who used effective writing strategies had higher self-efficacy and produced better writing outcomes. In Ethiopia, factors such as large class sizes, limited resources, and diverse linguistic backgrounds pose additional challenges to writing performance (Kifle, 2022). A study by Fikru (2023) highlights these challenges but does not extensively explore how specific writing strategies and self-efficacy impact performance. A focused investigation into these interrelationships can provide a clearer understanding of how to improve writing instruction and support for EFL students (Chen, 2022; Wang, 2023).

Ethiopian students face unique challenges that impact their writing skills, including diverse linguistic backgrounds, varying levels of English proficiency, and inadequate writing instruction resources. Kifle (2022) and Fikru (2023) highlight these challenges, emphasizing the need for research specific to higher education in Ethiopia. Understanding how writing strategies and self-efficacy interact within this context can inform more effective instructional practices and support mechanisms.

Despite the crucial role that writing plays in academic and career success, there remains a clear gap in understanding how writing strategies, self-efficacy, and performance interact among EFL students. Existing research provides insights into these factors individually, but there is a limited comprehensive study on their combined effects within the Ethiopian educational context. The studies conducted by Shen et al. (2024) and Sun and Wang (2020) did not consider the specific barriers faced by EFL students in Ethiopia, such as large class sizes and insufficient resources. Additionally, Balaman (2021) highlighted the importance of the interaction among writing strategies, self-efficacy, and writing performance; however, his findings were not used to investigate their combined effects.

Writing remains a challenging skill for EFL students (Demir, 2018) because it involves effectively transforming ideas into written language (Fajrina et al., 2021; Nurhayati, 2022). Prastikawati et al. (2020) argue that writing integrates physical and cognitive abilities. Further studies highlight the importance of emotion regulation, creativity, and information integration during the writing process (Ghoorchaei & Khosravi, 2019; Hu, 2022; Liu, 2015; Teng & Huang, 2022). Hu's findings reveal that many students struggle with grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and structure in their writing. These difficulties often arise from a lack of motivation, misguided beliefs, insufficient practice, and inadequate feedback from teachers (Tridinanti et al., 2020; Wang, 2023). Besides, students may be hesitant to express their ideas and emotions due to limited language resources (Chen, 2022; Raoofi et al., 2014; Shen et al., 2024; Teng & Wang, 2023) and unrealistic expectations about their writing abilities (Zhou et al., 2022). Karafil and Oguz (2022) emphasize that EFL students are less likely to engage in writing activities because it requires extensive knowledge and organizational skills in English.

As mentioned, students' writing abilities are often limited for various reasons. For example, students may be unable to use writing strategies to address their writing difficulties effectively (Chen, 2022; Fajrina et al., 2023; Inayah & Nanda, 2016). Besides, writing difficulties can stem from teachers' monotonous and unchanging instructional strategies (Boonyarattanasoontorn, 2017; Yulianti, 2018). Teachers often fail to train students effectively in using strategies to enhance their writing performance (Hu, 2022; Junianti et al., 2020; Khosravi et al., 2017; Teng & Huang, 2020). Wang (2023) also notes that many EFL students have a limited understanding of vocabulary, grammatical structure, content, and thought organization.

The present study investigates the relationship between writing strategies, writing performance, and self-efficacy. However, it remains unclear how specific writing strategies (e.g., planning, editing, and peer feedback) affect self-efficacy and performance (Chen, 2022; Zhang & Zhang, 2024). This highlights the need for more nuanced studies to understand how individual writing strategies influence various aspects of self-efficacy and performance (Fajrina et al., 2021; Hu, 2022; Yulianti, 2018).

Research must address Ethiopian EFL students' specific requirements, strategies, and self-efficacy to develop targeted interventions and teaching strategies. Most of the previous studies (Gupta & Woldemariam, 2011; Legesse et al., 2021; Mitiku, 2023; Nigussie et al., 2023; Wondim et al., 2024) have generalized findings without considering the specific barriers faced by EFL students in Ethiopia.

Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the interrelationships among writing strategies, self-efficacy, and performance among Ethiopian EFL students. By examining these factors, this study aims to understand their interactions and mutual influences comprehensively. To achieve this goal, the study will address the following fundamental research questions:

What is the relationship between writing self-efficacy and the use of writing strategies among English major students?

What kind of relationship is there between the writing strategies utilized by English major students and their writing performance?

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive-correlational research design was employed to explore and understand the relationships among writing strategies, self-efficacy, and writing performance among Ethiopian EFL students. The study measured three variables:

writing strategies, writing self-efficacy, and writing performance. Data were collected through questionnaires, the IELTS writing test, and interviews.

Participants and Sampling Techniques

The subjects were third and fourth-year EFL students. The study included 150 EFL students: 72 from Wolkite University (33 third-year students, and 39 fourth-year students) and 78 from Wachamo University (42 third-year students and 36 fourth-year students). A comprehensive sampling technique was used to select participants from English majors enrolled in Basic Writing Skills, Advanced Writing Skills I and II, and the Sophomore English course. Since the number of English majors was sufficient, all of them were included in the study.

Instruments

Questionnaire

This study's primary data collection tool was a questionnaire with two sections. The first section aimed to assess the frequency and types of writing strategies used by EFL students. The items in the questionnaire were adapted from Petric and Czarl (2003). The questionnaire included a self-report component detailing students' learning strategies to overcome writing challenges. Minor adjustments were made to the vocabulary, phrases, and sentence structure to make the language more approachable and accessible for EFL students.

Data on students' use of writing strategies were gathered using this questionnaire, which consisted of 53 closed-ended questions categorized as follows: social (1–7), affective (8–15), metacognitive (16–25), compensatory (26–30), cognitive (31–48), and memory (49–53). Items were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (“never or almost never applies to me”) to 5 (“always or almost always applies to me”). The adjusted reporting scale was used to describe the average score of writing strategies.

The second tool was a writing self-efficacy questionnaire designed to measure students' beliefs in their writing abilities and their confidence in performing writing tasks. The Self-Efficacy Questionnaire was adapted from Erkan and Saban (2011). It included thirty-three closed-ended items, with four Likert-scale responses: 1 (“I do it very well”), 2 (“I do it well”), 3 (“I do not do it well”), and 4 (“I do not do it at all”). The responses ranged from “almost never” to “almost always.”

The items were designed to measure four constructs: planning, self-examination, effort, and self-efficacy beliefs. The questionnaire was presented to the students in the target language.

Writing Performance Test

The IELTS writing test was used to assess students' writing abilities and overall performance. This standardized test provided a reliable measure of writing proficiency through consistent criteria. It included tasks that required students to respond to prompts in both descriptive and argumentative formats, evaluating their ability to organize ideas, use appropriate language, and develop coherent arguments. The test was scored based on criteria such as task achievement, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical range and accuracy derived from Read (2022). Each criterion was rated using the IELTS 0-9 scale to assess the learners' writing abilities. All 150 students who completed the questionnaire also took the exam.

Task 1 required students to write at least 150 words in 20 minutes, using information from a table to create a complete report. Task 2 required students to write at least 250 words in 40 minutes, focusing on crafting a persuasive essay. For Task 2, the topic was "Chewing Chat Should End," allowing students to utilize vocabulary and write a compelling argument.

All third-year EFL students took this test to evaluate the effectiveness of their overall writing strategies. Two raters (the researchers) independently assessed the students' assignments to ensure impartial grading. Finally, each student's writing performance on the IELTS exam was evaluated using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) for learning, teaching, and assessment (Athiworakun et al., 2018).

Interview

The third tool used to collect data was a semi-structured interview. Out of 150 respondents, 12 interviewees were selected using simple random sampling techniques. This approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth exploration and flexibility. The aim was to gain deeper insights into students' personal experiences with writing strategies, self-efficacy, and performance. Qualitative data can provide additional clarity and expand on the quantitative findings from the surveys.

The interviews were recorded using a smartphone, with each session lasting between 12 and 18 minutes. Interview guides were also utilized to ensure comprehensive data collection. Finally, the researchers transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted the recorded interviews.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

Two Ph.D. experts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) validated the instruments from Wolkite University; they each had 16 and 18 years of teaching experience at public universities in Ethiopia. These experts provided feedback on the content and face validity of the questionnaire items, the IELTS writing test, and interview questions. They also commented on the format requirements, item relevance for EFL learners, and how well the instruments measured what the researchers intended to evaluate. Based on their feedback, two irrelevant items were removed from the questionnaire (“Receiving feedback on my writing often makes me feel” and “I always use a dictionary to check spelling”). These items were replaced with more relevant ones, such as “Students must understand the standard format of good writing to become good writers” and “I get information via videocassettes.” The researchers incorporated these modifications and corrections to improve the validity of the instruments.

A pilot study was conducted to ensure the reliability of the tools and administration procedures. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were employed to evaluate the reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaires. The Cronbach’s alpha for the questionnaire was 0.910, indicating a high level of reliability. This result demonstrates that the items were dependable and suitable for assessing students’ writing strategies and self-efficacy levels.

Inter-rater reliability ensured the reliability of the IELTS writing test. Cohen’s Kappa was used to assess the consistency of the raters’ scores, revealing a significant agreement ($\kappa = 0.769$) between them. This result demonstrates the test’s high consistency and dependability in evaluating students’ writing performance.

To maintain the trustworthiness of the interview data, the researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with the interviewees. This approach maximized the credibility of the data.

Procedures

First, the researchers conducted a pilot study to evaluate the instruments. Second, they briefed the English teachers on the study’s objectives and worked with them to establish a data collection schedule. Third, the researchers instructed the learners to complete and submit the questionnaires with the assistance of their teachers. Fourth, after the questionnaires were completed: The researchers first introduced the students to the general objectives of the IELTS test. The students then received six hours of training on the general objectives of the IELTS test and the specific objectives of the IELTS writing test. Once the training was over, the students took the exam. Finally, the students took a 60-minute test in which they were required to write at least 400 words across two tasks.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. Descriptive statistics, such as the mean and standard deviation, were used to determine students' writing strategies and self-efficacy. The frequency with which students utilized writing strategies was assessed based on mean score benchmarks: 1.0-2.4 indicated low strategy use, 2.5-3.4 indicated moderate strategy use, and 3.5-5 indicated high strategy use (Oxford, 1990). In contrast, the relationship between variables was analyzed using inferential statistics, specifically Pearson's correlation coefficient.

Results

Students' responses to the first research question: *What is the relationship between writing self-efficacy and the use of writing strategies among English major students?*

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the frequency use of writing strategy

Strategies	Mean (M)	SD	Level of strategy use	Frequency of use	Rank
Memory	2.57	0.833	Medium	Sometimes used	1 st
Compensation	2.51	0.828	Medium	Sometimes used	2 nd
Social	2.33	0.744	Low	Not usually used	3 rd
Affective	2.21	0.678	Low	Not usually used	4 th
Cognitive	2.18	0.653	Low	Not usually used	5 th
Metacognitive	2.11	0.624	Low	Not usually used	6 th
Grand total	2.32	0.727	Low	Not usually used	

Table 1 illustrates that students generally used writing strategies at a low frequency. Among these strategies, memory ($M = 2.57$) and compensation ($M = 2.51$) strategies were used more frequently compared to social ($M = 2.33$), affective ($M = 2.21$), cognitive ($M = 2.18$), and metacognitive ($M = 2.11$) strategies. The overall trend indicated a moderate to low level of engagement with writing strategies in their learning process.

Table 2. The Mean Score of Students' Writing Self-efficacy

	Mean	Level
EFL students	2.24	Low

Table 2 indicates that EFL students' mean writing self-efficacy score was 2.24, which falls within the low range. This suggests that, on average, students reported low confidence in their writing abilities.

Table 3. Pearson's correlation results for students' writing strategy utilization and writing self-efficacy

		Writing strategies	Self-efficacy
Writing strategies	Pearson Correlation	1	.119**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	150	150
Self-efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.199**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	150	150

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

Table 3 shows a statistically significant but weakly positive correlation between students' writing strategy utilization and their writing self-efficacy ($r=0.119$). This indicated that while there was a slight tendency for higher writing strategy use to be associated with higher self-efficacy, the strength of this relationship was minimal.

Second research question: *What kind of a relationship exists between English major students' writing strategies and their writing performance?*

Table 3. The mean scores of students' IELTS writing test

		No	Mean	SD
Writing performance	Wolkite University	72	1.62	.649
	Wachamo University	78	1.60	.624
Total		150	1.61	.636

As demonstrated in Table 3, students across both Wolkite and Wachamo universities demonstrated similar performance levels in the IELTS writing test, with mean scores of 1.61. The scores indicate a generally consistent but modest level of writing proficiency among the students.

Table 4: Pearson's correlation between students' writing strategies and writing performance

		Writing strategies	Writing performance
Writing strategies	Pearson Correlation	1	.114**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	150	150
Writing performance	Pearson Correlation	.114**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	150	150

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 4 revealed a statistically significant, yet very weak positive correlation between writing strategies and writing performance ($r = 0.114$). This suggested that although there was a slight association indicating that better use of writing strategies related to marginally improved writing performance, the effect size was minimal.

Interview Results

Interviewees described a structured approach to essay writing, including brainstorming ideas, creating an outline, drafting the essay, revising, and editing. However, some students skipped the outlining phase and began drafting directly, especially if they were confident about their ideas. For instance, S2 said, "I start with brainstorming to get all my ideas down. Then I create an outline to organize them before writing the first draft." In contrast, S11 noted, "Sometimes I just start writing without an outline and revise later."

Students frequently found outlining, peer reviewing, and using writing templates to be helpful strategies. These methods were praised for assisting with organizing thoughts, improving structure, and providing constructive feedback. For example, S5 said, "Outlining helps me stay focused and ensures my essay has a clear structure." At the same time, S8 noted, "Peer review is valuable because it offers different perspectives and helps me catch mistakes I might otherwise miss."

Students consider factors such as the complexity of the task, their familiarity with the subject matter, and the type of writing required (e.g., argumentative versus descriptive). More experienced students demonstrated greater flexibility in using their strategies for different tasks. As S1 explained, "I adjust my strategies based on how familiar I am with the topic and the requirements of the assignment."

Students with high self-efficacy reported feeling confident in their writing abilities and often cited examples of successfully handling challenging assignments. In contrast,

those with lower self-efficacy expressed doubts about their writing skills and struggled with more complex tasks. For instance, S3 said, “I’m confident in my writing because I’ve received good grades and positive feedback on my essays,” while S6 remarked, “I sometimes doubt my abilities, especially when I’m given a topic I’m not familiar with.”

Previous success, positive feedback, and thorough preparation were factors that boosted confidence. Conversely, past failures, lack of preparation, and the perceived difficulty of tasks were cited as factors that undermined confidence. As S10 explained, “I feel more confident if I’ve done well in similar tasks before and if I’ve prepared thoroughly.”

Common strategies for handling writing challenges included seeking help from peers or instructors, revising drafts, and breaking tasks into smaller parts. Students who proactively sought assistance and revised their work reported better outcomes than those who avoided challenges. As S12 described, “When I encounter difficulties, I frequently seek assistance from my classmates or consult with my teacher. I also divide the writing assignment into smaller chunks and address each one independently.”

However, the results indicated a mismatch between students’ self-assessments and the evaluations provided by teachers. For example, S1 noted, “I evaluate my writing based on how clearly I’ve expressed my points and how effectively I’ve fulfilled the assignment requirements.” In contrast, S9 remarked, “Sometimes I believe my writing is better than the comments I receive. I need to work on better understanding my teacher’s expectations.”

Goals for improving writing commonly included enhancing grammar, expanding vocabulary, and refining essay structure. To achieve these goals, students planned to engage in practice, read extensively, and seek feedback from peers and instructors. For instance, S7 stated, “I want to improve my grammar and vocabulary, so I’m reading more academic texts and writing more frequently. In addition, I intend to attend writing workshops and seek more feedback from my teachers.” This approach reflects a commitment to both self-directed and guided improvement in writing skills.

Reactions to feedback varied widely, ranging from appreciation and constructive use to frustration and defensiveness. Students who viewed feedback positively typically incorporated it effectively into their revisions, while those who were defensive often struggled to implement useful changes. Additionally, two interviewees mentioned:

I appreciate feedback because it helps me understand my weaknesses and improve my writing. (S2)

Sometimes, I find it hard to accept criticism, but I try to use the feedback to make my writing better. (S9)

Generally, the interview data revealed that effective writing strategies, such as outlining and peer review, were strongly linked to higher confidence and improved performance among EFL students. Higher self-efficacy contributed to more effective use of writing strategies and better management of writing challenges. Additionally, students who actively sought and incorporated feedback typically performed better, although there was variability in how feedback was received and utilized. These findings indicate that targeted interventions should prioritize enhancing self-efficacy, refining writing strategies, and improving students' overall writing proficiency.

Discussion

The relationship between Students' Writing Strategies and Writing Self-efficacy

The findings indicated a positive but weak correlation between EFL students' use of effective writing strategies and their writing self-efficacy ($r = 0.119$). Students who reported employing strategies such as planning, drafting, revising, and seeking feedback demonstrated greater confidence in their writing abilities. However, writing self-efficacy was not a strong predictor of using these strategies. The interview results also confirmed that learners had low writing self-efficacy in using effective writing strategies. This suggests that students with lower writing self-efficacy may use less effective writing practices, and those with higher self-efficacy may not necessarily use more effective strategies.

This finding is consistent with Demir's (2018) theory of self-efficacy, which posits that effective strategies can enhance an individual's confidence and perceived competence. Structured writing strategies can help EFL students develop their writing skills and boost their self-confidence. This reciprocal relationship indicates that teachers should incorporate strategy training into writing instruction to foster both skill development and self-efficacy.

This result aligns with previous research on the relationship between students' writing self-efficacy and their use of writing strategies (Aidinlou & Far, 2014; Balaman, 2021; Blasco, 2016; Chen, 2022; Khosravi et al., 2017; Li et al., 2022; Nurhayati, 2022; Sumarsono & Mbato, 2021; Teng & Wang, 2023; Wang, 2023; Zhang & Zhang, 2024). Jin (2023) noted that self-efficacy beliefs influence learners' writing strategies. According to Karafil and Oguz (2022), writing self-efficacy enhances students' awareness of effectively applying various writing strategies. Additionally, Aidinlou and Far (2014) demonstrated a strong correlation between writing self-efficacy and the use of writing strategies. Raoofi and Maroofi (2017) indicated that students who monitor their progress, regulate the effectiveness of their learning strategies, explore new methods, and show enthusiasm for completing tasks efficiently tend to achieve better results.

Interestingly, this finding aligns with prior studies on the relationship between students' writing self-efficacy and their use of writing strategies. However, the weak correlation between EFL students' use of effective writing strategies and their writing self-efficacy can be attributed to several factors. First, EFL students might use a variety of writing strategies, and their self-efficacy could be influenced by factors beyond these strategies, leading to a weak overall correlation. Additionally, individual differences in students' perceptions of their writing ability and their strategies' effectiveness may dilute this association's strength. Measurement limitations also contribute; the tools used to assess writing strategies and self-efficacy might not fully capture the complexity of their interaction, thus weakening the observed relationship. Finally, contextual factors such as varying levels of support, resources, or personal challenges could affect writing self-efficacy independently of the strategies employed.

The relationship between Students' Writing Strategies and Writing Performance

The results indicated that the correlation between students' use of writing strategies and their writing performance was weak, though positive ($r = 0.114$). Additionally, interview data revealed that strategies such as comprehensive pre-writing planning and iterative revisions were only marginally associated with improved writing outcomes. This implied that using writing strategies was not a reliable predictor of academic writing performance. In other words, the findings suggested that students did not effectively apply these strategies to address their writing difficulties.

Previous research on English writing skills supports this finding (Bai et al., 2014; Çetinkaya & Bilgan, 2018; Chen, 2022; He, 2019; Hu, 2022; Junianti et al., 2020; Khosravi et al., 2017; Mutar, 2019; Sumarsono & Mbato, 2021; Shen & Bai, 2024; Teng et al., 2022). For example, Raoofi et al. (2017) demonstrated a direct relationship between writing strategies and writing performance. Similarly, Oussou et al. (2024) identified a positive link between students' writing strategies and their performance. These studies suggest that employing effective writing strategies can significantly enhance learners' writing proficiency. Furthermore, research by Ghooarchaei and Khosravi (2019) indicates that high achievers and low achievers differ in their use of learning strategies and approaches to writing challenges. Consequently, students, irrespective of their writing ability, often seek assistance from various teachers when writing in English, as it is a complex skill requiring both language and content knowledge (Balaman, 2021).

While there was a positive association between students' use of writing strategies and writing performance, the link between these factors was weak for several reasons. First, students use a variety of writing strategies, and not all are equally effective, which can dilute the overall correlation. Second, other factors, such as individual skills, motivation, and external support, influence writing performance, which may weaken

the relationship with writing strategies. Measurement issues might also play a role, as the tools used may not fully capture the complexity of the interaction between strategies and performance. Lastly, contextual factors like classroom environment, feedback quality, and resource availability could affect writing performance independently of the writing strategies employed, further diminishing the strength of the observed correlation.

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Conclusions

The study revealed a statistically significant but weak positive correlation between students' use of writing strategies and their writing self-efficacy ($r = 0.119$). This indicates a slight tendency for students who use writing strategies more frequently to report higher self-efficacy. However, the minimal strength of this relationship suggests that other factors may have a more substantial impact on writing self-efficacy.

Additionally, the findings demonstrated a statistically significant but very weak positive correlation between writing strategies and writing performance ($r = 0.114$). This result implies that while a slight association indicates that better use of writing strategies is somewhat linked to improved writing performance, the effect size is minimal. The very weak correlation suggests that the influence of writing strategies on performance is limited, and other variables might play a more significant role in determining writing outcomes.

Implications

Educators should consider incorporating more comprehensive training on writing strategies. It may be beneficial to teach specific strategies and address how these strategies can contribute to building students' self-efficacy. Strategies should be integrated into a broader framework that includes self-regulation and reflection to help students understand their impact on writing confidence.

The minimal strength of the correlation between writing strategies and writing self-efficacy suggests that other factors, such as individual differences, prior experiences, and external support, may play a more significant role. Therefore, teachers should focus on creating a supportive learning environment that includes personalized feedback, encouragement, and opportunities for students to set and achieve personal writing goals, potentially enhancing self-efficacy more effectively.

The very weak correlation between writing strategies and writing performance indicates that simply increasing the use of writing strategies may have a limited impact on improving performance. Teachers might need to explore additional factors that contribute to writing success, such as content knowledge, critical thinking skills, and the quality of feedback provided. A more holistic approach that combines strategy instruction with these other elements could yield better results in improving writing performance.

Recommendations

It is recommended that English teachers should provide more comprehensive training on writing strategies, focusing not only on specific techniques but also on how these strategies can enhance students' self-efficacy. To maximize the effectiveness of this training, it should be incorporated into a broader educational framework that includes self-regulation, reflective practices, and personalized support. Additionally, teachers should create a supportive learning environment that offers tailored feedback, encouragement, and opportunities for students to set and achieve personal writing goals, which can help strengthen their writing confidence.

Teachers should consider adopting a more holistic approach that integrates writing strategies with other factors that influence writing outcomes, such as content knowledge, critical thinking skills, and the quality of feedback. This comprehensive approach could more effectively improve students' overall writing performance.

Teachers should engage in continuous professional development to address the complex factors influencing writing self-efficacy and performance. Training programs should focus on the latest research and effective practices in writing instruction, including how to integrate strategy training with broader pedagogical techniques and support mechanisms.

The study found a weak positive correlation between writing strategy use and writing self-efficacy, as well as a very weak correlation between writing strategies and performance. As a result, future research should investigate other factors that may significantly impact students' writing self-efficacy and performance, such as individual differences (e.g., motivation, prior knowledge, cognitive abilities) and external influences (e.g., feedback, classroom environment). This broader approach could provide a more comprehensive understanding of what drives writing success.

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Authors

Mitiku Tasisa Dinsa is an assistant professor at Wolkite University in Ethiopia. His research focuses on language learning strategies, as well as writing and speaking skills.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0112-9231>

Dr. Esayas Teshome Taddese is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education and Liberal Arts at NTI International University, Nilai, Malaysia. His research interests lie in the areas of teacher education, teacher professional development, pedagogy, and comparative education.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8988-7311>

Authors

Roger Segura Arias is an assistant professor of English at Universidad Nacional, Brunca Branch. He holds a M.A in Applied Linguistics with an ESP emphasis from the Universidad Nacional. He has taught and trained pre-service teachers, English learners, and has taught ESP courses to in-service professionals and pre-service students at Universidad de Costa Rica's Inglés por Áreas Program and other private institutions in Costa Rica. His research interests are the use of technology in language education, ESP curriculum design and instruction, second-language pronunciation learning, and critical applied linguistics.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1553-3953>

Karla Daniela Herrera Rodríguez is an assistant professor of English at Universidad Nacional, Brunca Branch. She holds a professional master's degree in educational sciences. She has taught and trained pre-service teachers in Costa Rica. Her research interests include ESP instruction, second-language pronunciation learning, and the development of listening skills in English as a second language.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5820-0588>