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The Predictive Role of Gender, Self-efficacy and Motivation on Students' Writing Skills

By

Jane Genga -Ayiemba
Department of Education
University of Eastern Africa, Baraton
P.O. Box 2500, Eldoret, Kenya
Email: janegenga@gmail.com

Abstract

In this study, the predictive role of self-efficacy, gender and motivation in university students' writing skills was examined. Examining whether the participants' mean self-efficacy and motivation scores differ significantly by gender were the sub-objectives of the research. The present study was carried out with 323 university students. T-test and multiple regression analysis were used to analyze the data and analyses were carried out via IBM SPSS Statistics 20. Findings indicated that the means score of participants did not differ significantly in terms of gender. The findings also indicate that there is neither a significant relationship between the students' gender and their self-efficacy in writing skills nor their gender and motivation to learn writing skills in English.

Keywords: Gender, Self- Efficacy, Motivation, Writing skills

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Introduction

Qi-rong as cited in Taneri (2017) asserts that the old-fashioned education systems generally have disregarded the emotions of learners and concentrated on the cognitive skills of learners. Cognitive and affective skills, as fundamental skills to contribute learning, help to develop ways of inquiry, make students active, develop the sense of responsibility for their own learning, and produce continuing learning. Cognitive and affective learning are essential parts of a whole that cannot be separated from each other (LeBlanc & Gallavan as cited in Taneri, 2017).

According to Schmitt (2002) motivation is often seen as the key learner variable because without it nothing happens. Therefore, through identifying learning motivations in language learners researchers can determine the kinds of tasks that learners need to get involved in, the level of proficiency that learners are expected to attain, and the kind of intervention required for facilitating the learning process (Abu Baker, Sulaiman, & Rafeai, 2010).

A positive self-efficacy can lead to positive results, such as success in language learning, as well as influencing the decision of the students in terms of engaging in class activities. Students obviously perform voluntarily and willingly in activities that they consider themselves capable of; on the other hand, they tend to avoid participating in those they believe to be beyond their ability.

A lot of significance has also been attached to the influence of gender on language learning that it cannot be ignored as a factor that influences how male and female students learn any skill therein, thus writing skills in English.

Statement of the Problem

Keen attention needs to be paid to the emotional attachment of students to writing skills in English and self-efficacy and motivation are key measures of the students' affective competency in the same. Some studies have come up to show a discrepancy on the same when students are classified according to gender; for example the study by Fallan & Opstad (2016) provided evidence that males have higher self-efficacy than females. It is on this background and with particular interests on writing skills in English that the researcher sought to find out how self-efficacy, motivation and gender play a role in university students' writing skills in English learning.

Review of Related Literature

Motivation has been defined differently in different schools. In Behaviorism, motivation is the acquisition of positive reinforcement to repeat the action for obtaining rewards. In Cognitivism motivation is the choices that people make. It is the forces behind our decisions. In Constructivism, in the definition of motivation the emphasis is on the social context and the belief is that each person is motivated differently (Brown, 2014). Motivation is dynamic as it evolves during the learning process (Dornyei, 2007). High motivation to learn a language is a key factor in successful second language learning (De Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2005).

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Among a multitude of factors, motivation is probably one of the fundamental determinants of individuals' action. Dörnyei (2007) considers it decisive enough to be responsible for determining human behavior by energizing it and giving it direction. This means that motivation is a goal-directed comportment that is combined with the drive and the intent to work towards that goal. Picturing motivation in a writing class, motivation can get students learning by pointing them to the right direction and sustaining their engagement. With this kind of view, therefore, motivation is not viewed as a static product characteristic of a learner; it is, nevertheless, seen as a process through which the learner is involved in some action or other.

The word action suggests that the individual is a doer that performs out of determination, and conscious decision, which can explain why terms like goal-oriented, reasoned action, etc. are dominantly employed in characterizing this process (Dörnyei, 2007). Theories concerning motivation attempt to explain why humans behave and think as they do. This notion is also of great importance in language education. Teachers and students commonly use the term to explain what causes success or failure in learning (Cheung, 2018). Indeed, motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate skills learnt in a language learning class and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process. Without sufficient motivation, individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals. Similarly, appropriate curricula and good teaching are not enough on their own to ensure student achievement; students also need to have a degree of self-motivation.

The self-efficacy of students regarding language learning is another key factor in successful language learning, which is concerned with both personal judgments, and based on the performance levels of the students in course activities. According to the findings of theorists specializing in self-efficacy (Bandura, as cited in Kruglansk, Eyal, & Chernikova, 2014; Shuck, 1997), people have the potential to achieve their goals, and their positive or negative thoughts can be seen to lead to either success or failure.

Learners, who have low anxiety during a task performance, feel at ease and tend to perceive the situation as pleasant, therefore they strengthen their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy beliefs affect the choices that people make and the actions they take in response to their own decisions. Individuals tend to choose to undertake those tasks that they feel more confident about and to try to avoid those which they do not feel competent about (Pajares, 2003). Beliefs about self-efficacy also help determine how much effort people invest in an activity, how long they endure when encountering obstacles, and how resilient they will be in the face of adverse situations. Researchers have claimed that the higher an individual's sense of efficacy, the greater that individual's effort, persistence, and resilience are likely to be; thus, self-efficacy exercises a powerful influence on the individual's level of accomplishment (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2007).

While self-efficacy has an effect on an individual's task choice, the amount of efforts put into the task, and persistence on the task. It also influences academic motivation, learning, and achievement (Choi, 2005; Pintrich & Schunk, as cited in Long, Ming & Chen, 2013). In other words, students with positive self-efficacy are willing to put more effort into and be more persistent on the academic tasks they choose. In addition, they usually have higher levels of academic motivation and better performance. Self-efficacy in English writing is an individual's belief or confidence in his ability to use the English language to communicate with others in writing, understand English conversations or writings and read materials written in English. Students' English writing self-efficacy is strongly related to their actual English language proficiency. It is not surprising that students with higher levels of writing

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self-efficacy (i.e., belief in their competence as writers) experience higher levels of writing achievement according to Graham, Berninger and Fan (as cited in Bustamante & Eom, 2017). As with any complex task, beliefs of competence can affect the effort and persistence level students are willing to expend on writing as well as their enjoyment level (Anderman & Wolters, 2006).

Each student is unique and complex and this should not blind us to the fact that gender is one of the two great organizing principles in child development (Sax, 2010). Gender is the key descriptor of every student. It plays a major role in an individual's schooling, shaping the entirety of the learning experiences at all levels of learning, especially in co-educational institutions. Therefore, ignoring the effects of gender on learning, in such institutions may lead to selection of learning environments and materials for both the male and the female students. According to Andreou, Vlachos & Andreou(2005) gender is well thought out as one of the main factors that influence second language learning. Psychologists find no differences in general intelligence on the standard measures but scores on some tests of specific abilities continue to show gender differences (Woolfolk, 2014).

The significant relationship between gender and abilities has been proven by abundant research but of concern is the fact that culture, race, and ethnicity may have not been put into consideration (Woolfolk, 2014). According to Kaiser (2006), when looking at specific abilities, males have been found to be better than women at certain subjects like mathematics. But, research shows that girls have reached parity with boys in mathematical performance in the United States and some other developed western countries (Woolfolk, 2014).

An array of views about why gender differences influence learning have also been brought together. One such view, points us to the biological characteristics of the different genders (Ning, Dai & Zhang 2010). Other views, on the other hand, reject this relationship, suggesting instead that social and cultural reasons cause the huge gap between men and women in many fields including language learning (Kaiser, 2006; Ning, Dai & Zhang, 2010).

According to Catalan (2003) gender is a classic and significant predictor in educational, psychological and linguistic research which is why every research into the abilities to learn a second language continues to take into account gender as an important variable.

Research Questions

This study was that was conducted to examine the predictive roles of general self-efficacy, motivation and gender on university students' learning of English writing skills was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the levels of self-efficacy and motivation of participants?
2. Do the participants' scores in self-efficacy in learning English language differ significantly by gender?
3. Do the participants' motivation to learn English language scores differ significantly by gender?

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Method

The study group comprised of 323 university students from private universities within the Western region of Kenya. The study group consisted of volunteer participants and was selected taking into account the level of gender representation. Of the participants 45.8% (N = 148) were female and 54.2% (N = 175) were male.

Both the Self-Efficacy and motivation scales were developed by the researcher for the measurement of the levels of the said variables among the participants. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for self-efficacy was calculated as .76. The scale consisted of 10 items which aimed to assess to what extent university students perceived themselves as efficient enough to deal with the challenges that came with learning writing skills in English language. The scores were rated on a 4 point scale ranging from 1 – 4. The higher score indicated greater self-efficacy perceptions. The motivation scale consisted of 12 subscales. The interval consistency coefficient was calculated as .90. The scores were equally rated on a 4 point scale ranging from 1 – 4 with the higher scores indicating greater motivation to learn writing skills in English.

In the present study analyses were carried out via IBM SPSS Statistics 20. T-test was used to examine the significance of difference between mean scores of participants' in terms of gender; regression analysis was used to determine the effect of the independent variable (gender) on the dependent variables (self-efficacy and motivation in learning writing skills in English). The hypothesis was tested at .01 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

The basic descriptive statistics for the study variables of interest are presented in Table 1. Using the following scale of interpretation, the researcher was able to draw conclusions on the descriptive statistics ratings of the variables of interest: Agree (High/Positive) = 3.50 – 4.00, Tend to Agree (Average/Tend to be positive) = 2.50 – 3.49, Tend to Disagree (Below average/Tend to be negative) = 1.50 – 2.49, Disagree (Low/Negative) = 1.00 – 1.49.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for Study Variables

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Self-Efficacy in English	Male	175	2.7554	.81626	.06170
Writing	Female	148	2.6622	.82951	.06819
Motivation to learn English	Male	175	2.7132	.80171	.06060
writing	Female	148	2.7416	.85470	.07026

Source: Field Data 2019

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the self-efficacy and motivation of students in writing skills when classified according to gender. The results of this study show that male students rate slightly higher in motivation in writing skills as shown by their mean of 2.67 as compared to their female counterparts with a mean of 2.64. The descriptive statistics display the self-efficacy of male and female students in writing skills in private universities. The results display that male students rate slightly higher in self-efficacy in writing skills as shown by their mean of 2.76 as compared to their female counterparts with a mean of 2.66. The variation in the way the male and female students responded to the items on self-efficacy was almost similar as exhibited by the standard deviation change of .82 and .83 respectively

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in their responses to items therein. These findings seem to suggest that the male and female students, when it comes to writing skills in English, rate the same in self-efficacy. The descriptive statistics on table 1 also show the motivation scores of male and female students towards writing skills in English in private universities. The results of this study show that female students rate slightly higher in motivation in writing skills as shown by their mean of 2.74 as compared to their male counterparts with a mean of 2.71. The responses given by the male and female students as far as motivation was concerned show that the male students' responses to the items on motivation were more homogenous exhibited by their standard deviation change of .80 as compared to the female students' standard deviation change of .85. The female students' responses to the items on motivation were more varied.

The results of t test to determine whether a significant self-efficacy in writing skills mean difference exists according to gender were presented in Table 2.

Table 2. T test results for self-efficacy mean differences according to gender

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Self-Efficacy in leaning writing skills * GENDER					
Between Groups (Combined)	.698	1	.698	1.031	.311
Within Groups	217.080	321	.676		
Total	217.778	322			

Source: Field Data 2019

When the table 2 is examined, it can be seen that-test analysis results did not show a statistically significant difference in means between female and male students in terms of the self-efficacy in writing skills ($p=0.311>0.01$).

The results of t test to determine whether a significant motivation to learn writing skills in English mean difference exists according to gender were presented in Table 3

Table 3. T test results for motivation mean differences according to gender

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Motivation to learn writing Skills * GENDER					
Between Groups (Combined)	.063	1	.063	.093	.761
Within Groups	219.396	321	.683		
Total	219.460	322			

Source: Field Data 2019

When the table 3 is examined, it can be seen that-test analysis results did not show a statistically significant difference in means between female and male students in terms of motivation to learn English language writing skills ($p=0.761>0.01$).

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Table 4: Model Summary of Regression Analysis for gender in Learning English Writing Skills

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.149 ^a	.022	.016	.49500

a. Predictors: (Constant), Motivation to learn writing Skills, Self-Efficacy in leaning writing skills

Motivation to learn writing Skills and Self-Efficacy in leaning writing skills account for only 1.6% of the variation of how the two genders rate them.

Table 5: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.777	2	.889	3.627	.028 ^b
	Residual	78.408	320	.245		
	Total	80.186	322			

Predictors: (Constant), Motivation to learn writing Skills, Self-Efficacy in leaning writing skills

Table 5 illustrates that the overall regression model was not significant, $F(2,320) = 3.627$, $p = 0.028 > .01$, $R^2 = .016$. Gender does not predict students' self-efficacy and motivation in learning writing skills in English significantly.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of the study indicated that participants reported average levels of self-efficacy and motivation to learn writing skills in English. It was also found that the mean self-efficacy and motivation scores of participants did not differ according to gender. These findings of this which sought to find out if there is a significant difference in the students' self-efficacy and motivation to learn writing skills in English agrees with other studies that found similar results. One of the studies was of Akay and Toraman's (2015) whose main objective of their descriptive study was to determine English language learners' attitudes towards grammar and to analyze these attitudes in the framework of several variables (gender, age, faculty, time spent on learning English, and proficiency level) collected data from 293 students who had English language education in preparatory school of Anadolu University in six different proficiency levels.

The analyses revealed that gender among other variables like age, time spent on learning English, and proficiency level variables did not create significant differences in the attitudes. In yet another similar study carried out by Karatas, Alci, Bademcioglu, and Ergin, (2016) who aimed to understand if the students' attitudes towards learning English shows significant differences in terms of gender, language level, receiving English preparatory training, and the kind of high school they graduated from. The study was carried out in the descriptive survey model within a research group which comprised 320 male (65.6 %) 136 and 168 female (34.4 %) students of English at a preparatory school at Istanbul Technical

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University. Data which was analyzed using independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA made them come to a conclusion that the university students' attitudes towards learning English are not affected by gender and the other variables which included receiving preparatory training, language level and high school differentiation.

It is noteworthy that this research is important in terms of aiming to describe the degree of and relationship between self-efficacy, motivation and gender. However, the current study is limited in terms of sampling. Further studies with larger sample size will be needed to confirm these results and to make contribution to the field. Future studies may examine the level of other affective competencies not only in other skills involved in learning English but also other subjects and also of the relationship between these other competencies and other personality traits. Track analysis studies on variables that may have an impact on students' affective competencies may also be useful to understand this construct.

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