

Affective Factors in Online Writing Performance: Do They Matter?

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3 Affective Factors in Online Writing Performance: Do They Matter?¹

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Abstract

Large teaching moved to online learning due to the Coronavirus outbreak. This study was carried out to describe the correlation between students' self-efficacy levels, motivation, attitude, and anxiety across proficiency levels, the difference between the four affective factors across proficiency levels, and how these affective factors affect students' performance in an online writing module or emergency remote teaching. Eighty-one students taking a paragraph writing course participated in the study and were divided into high, moderate, and low proficiency levels. Four sets of questionnaires inquiring about the students' affective factors and writing scores were used as the main data sources. ANOVA was performed to compare the level of the four affective factors. The results showed that only motivation is at a high level, while the levels of self-efficacy, attitude and anxiety are at a moderate level. Among the affective factors, the levels of self-efficacy and motivation are significantly different across proficiency levels, while attitude and anxiety are not. Further, the result of the simultaneous analysis showed that among the four affective factors only motivation was found to have a significant effect on students' performance in the online writing class module. The findings of the study illustrate that writing teachers have the responsibility to create a non-threatening classroom atmosphere as an alternative way to increase students' writing motivation.

Resumen

La enseñanza de idiomas se ha trasladado al aprendizaje en línea debido al brote del Coronavirus. Este estudio se llevó a cabo para describir la correlación de los niveles de autoeficacia, motivación, actitud y ansiedad de los estudiantes en los niveles de competencia lingüística, la diferencia de los cuatro factores afectivos en los niveles de competencia y cómo estos factores afectivos inciden en el desempeño de los estudiantes en un modo de escritura en línea o enseñanza remota de emergencia. Ochenta y un estudiantes que tomaron un curso de redacción de párrafos participaron en el estudio y se dividieron en niveles de competencia alto, moderado y bajo. Se utilizaron cuatro conjuntos de cuestionarios que indagaban acerca de los factores afectivos de los estudiantes y la puntuación de escritura de los estudiantes como fuentes principales de datos. Se realizó ANOVA para comparar el nivel de los cuatro factores afectivos. Los resultados mostraron que solo la motivación se encuentra en el nivel alto, mientras que el nivel de autoeficacia, actitud y ansiedad se encuentran en un nivel moderado. Entre los factores afectivos, los niveles de autoeficacia y motivación son significativamente diferentes entre los niveles de competencia, mientras que la actitud y la ansiedad no lo son. Además, el resultado del análisis simultáneo mostró que, entre los cuatro factores afectivos, solo se encontró que la motivación tenía un efecto significativo en el desempeño de los estudiantes en el modo de clase de escritura en línea. Los hallazgos de este estudio arrojan luz sobre la responsabilidad de los profesores de escritura de crear una atmósfera de clase no amenazante como una forma alternativa de aumentar la motivación de los estudiantes por la escritura.

Introduction

In the EFL context, writing is still perceived as a difficult activity, specifically in organizing ideas and developing supporting details (Park, 2018). The limited vocabulary, lack of appropriate word choice knowledge, and grammatical problems are also considered factors influencing the poor quality of the students' writing (Chen, 2002; Mojica, 2010). In addition, a study conducted by Umamah et al. (2019) found that EFL students deal with writing difficulties in all writing components such as grammar, mechanics, organization, and content, and style. Not only cognitive factors (e.g., knowledge of grammar, organization, content, and style) influence students' writing proficiency, but also some affective factors such as

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motivation, anxiety, self-efficacy, motivation, and attitude (Erkan & Saban, 2011; Pajares and Valiante, 1997; Wu & Pin-hsiang, 2008) might also affect the quality of writing.

Teaching writing is not limited to face-to-face meetings since teachers can conduct writing activities outside the class using online applications. The development of science and technology also pushes teachers to apply excellent teaching instruction, i.e., online learning that affects the stimulation of students' interests and affective factors (Zhu & Zhou, 2012). Thus, students are required to have the capability to access materials from online sources (Zhang, 2019). They also need to keep in touch more to learn through online learning. Moreover, for the time being, all universities in Bangladesh are forced to conduct online classes due to the Coronavirus. All courses must be delivered online, including a writing course, which primarily requires face-to-face interaction. Some studies (e.g., Elfaki et al., 2019; Kerzic et al., 2019; Rhema et al., 2014) found that both teachers and students felt positive about the implementation of online learning. However, this full online class module leads to a different learning atmosphere than the usual face-to-face writing class. This new situation might influence the students' affective aspects, which have a crucial role in language learning because they deal with emotions that can facilitate or hinder students' language acquisition (Gonzalez Ramirez et al., 2021). Although the implementation of online learning is perceived as helpful, few studies have explored the relationship between students' affective factors (e.g., self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and anxiety) and their performance in an online writing class.

Based on the above, it is obvious that the four affective factors (i.e., self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and anxiety) could have an impact on students' writing performance. Moreover, due to the diversity of students' backgrounds in Bangladesh, it is perceptible that affective factors influence their writing performance. Consequently, it is necessary to examine the relationship between these four affective factors and writing performance. It is important to find out the correlation between teaching writing online and self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and anxiety, which are the variables. It may also give a novel result if the four factors are examined to see their correlations to students' writing performance. Therefore, this research was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of students' self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and anxiety across proficiency levels?
2. Is there any significant difference in students' self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and anxiety across proficiency levels?
3. To what extent do self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and anxiety contribute to students' writing performance in an online class module?

Literature Review

Writing in an online class module

Online learning can be carried out using online applications (e.g., Edmodo and Google Docs) (Yavuz et al., 2020; Neuman & Kopcha, 2019) or a learning model (e.g., a flipped classroom) (Wu-Chi et al., 2019). Since the learning activities in this research context were fully conducted online, this study employed the term online learning. Online learning is defined as "the use of the Internet to access learning materials; to interact with the content, instructor, and other learners; and to obtain support during the learning process, to acquire knowledge, construct personal meaning, and grow from the learning experience" (Ally, 2004, p. 7). The writing activities in this research setting had to be moved online due to the global pandemic.

Neumann and Kopcha (2019) applied the online class via Google Docs for peer-then-teacher feedback for three weeks and found that students' writing performance was improved in the first and second drafts of argumentative writing. Besides, Mair (2020) claimed that the integration of such platforms successfully facilitates students' writing. As revealed by Anggraini and Cahyono (2020), the discussion forum activity using platforms can facilitate students' social interaction to help one another. For example, students become enthusiastic about correcting their friends' writing errors (Conroy, 2010), especially in the discussion forum in Edmodo, chat room in Google Classroom, and also a group in WhatsApp. However, little evidence was found that students achieve better in writing performance through online technology. Ritchie and Black (2012) found that online forum discussion is positively correlated with students' argumentative writing performance. The contribution of online class settings could be further understood if the influence of online classes on other text genres were studied.

Regarding applying technology in online writing classes, teachers have to make sure that students do not feel insecure about their learning process. Although some research studies have claimed that online classes

could increase students' engagement and motivation (Aborisade, 2013; Bostanci & Çavuşoğlu, 2018; Eydelman, 2013), the question is whether the implementation of the online class can decrease students' anxiety and increase self-efficacy. Therefore, an investigation of the role of affective factors in an online writing class would strengthen the previous claims concerning the positive effects of technology in a writing class.

The students' affective factors in writing performance

Writing refers to an activity to express and to communicate ideas with readers. A writer should be able to position himself as a reader to understand the intended meaning well. Being able to communicate in a written form is the top goal of EFL learners, which is carried out through some stages: planning, drafting, editing, and publishing (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). Furthermore, Nunan (2003) argued that writing is a combination of physical and mental acts. Activities refer to putting words or ideas in various forms, such as typing or handwriting. Meanwhile, generating and organizing ideas in a written form are categorized as mental activities. Writing as a productive skill is considered a demanding activity since it involves cognitive and affective factors.

The influence of affective factors, such as motivation, self-efficacy, attitude, and writing anxiety, on students' writing achievement have been studied extensively (Erkan & Saban, 2011; Sabti et al., 2019; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Self-efficacy is considered crucial in the teaching-learning process. Students who show strong self-efficacy can decrease their anxiety in accomplishing tasks, especially in writing activities (Pajares & Johnson, 1994). Studies conducted by some researchers (Erkan & Saban, 2011; Povich & Mark, 2003; Sabti et al., 2019; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016) have also reported that students who have a high degree of self-efficacy, low level of anxiety, and a positive attitude toward writing tasks have a good writing performance; self-efficacy, anxiety, and attitude influence students' writing performance (Pratama et al., 2018). Specifically, students with high self-efficacy produce outstanding compositions concerning their complexity and fluency (Zabihi, 2017).

Another affective factor to consider is motivation. Students who have motivation and positive attitude toward learning may have more strategies in writing (Gupta & Woldemarian, 2011) and demonstrate a good writing performance (Erkan & Saban, 2011; Sabti et al., 2019; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Gupta and Woldemarian (2011) also claimed that those with good motivations and attitudes seemed to enjoy writing more than those without. Moreover, the study conducted by Djafri and Wimbarti (2018) found that motivation did not positively affect students' anxiety, whereas attitude has a significant effect on students' language anxiety.

Learners' attitude towards language learning plays a prominent role in students' acquisition success (Gardner & Lambret, 1972). Furthermore, Brown (2007) explains that learners have their own beliefs toward the language they learn whether they will pay attention and focus or not. In addition, they can select any beneficial and interesting materials to simplify the learning process. Ellis (1994) mentioned that students will likely show different perceptions of the language they are learning and its usage, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Students with high motivation and a positive attitude will successfully learn the target language. Results of previous studies revealed a positive correlation between attitude and writing performance. Students with a positive attitude towards writing produced longer compositions than their negative attitude counterparts (Kotula et al., 2014; McKenna et al., 1995). Furthermore, the success of learning the language will form their positive attitude and vice versa. Students may not perform their best unless they have a positive attitude toward the L2.

Research studies concerning writing anxiety have been carried out in various contexts such as China (Zhang, 2011), Malaysia (Huwari & Aziz, 2011), Iran (Rezaei & Jafari, 2014), Bangladesh (Kurniasih, 2013; Kusumaningputri et al., 2018; Wahyuni et al., 2019) Turkey (Erkan & Saban, 2013; Kırmızı & Kırmızı, 2015), Spain (Aula Blasco, 2016) and India (Jennifer & Ponniah, 2017). They measured the level of writing anxiety and its types experienced by the students. Most of those studies found that students experienced high anxiety when they were in different writing situations, like writing a thesis, writing assignments, and writing journals (Huwari & Aziz, 2011). Furthermore, a study comparing first-year students to sophomores also found that the most common type of writing anxiety was cognitive. The next types of anxiety were somatic anxiety and avoidance behavior (Jennifer & Ponniah, 2017; Kurniasih, 2013; Kusumaningputri et al., 2018; Zhang, 2011). Meanwhile, Wahyuni et al. (2019) found that sophomore, junior, and senior students experienced moderate levels of anxiety. Other studies unveiled that low anxiety students have a good writing performance (Erkan & Saban, 2011; Sabti et al., 2019; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Yet, the investigation

of anxiety in language learning still reported contradictory results. Some studies explored the effect of anxiety in writing on the students' writing ability, and they shared similar findings that writing anxiety is negatively correlated with students' writing performance. Students with higher levels of anxiety were likely to perform their writing poorly compared to those with lower anxiety (Kurniasih, 2017; Zabihi et al., 2018; Zhang, 2011).

Most studies revealed that anxiety was the main negative predictor of students' writing performance. However, the previous researchers did not involve students' proficiency levels in categorizing the affective factors. The detailed investigation of the levels of anxiety correlated to the levels of students' proficiency can give wider explanations concerning students' anxiety in writing performance.

The studies above proved that affective aspects play prominent roles in language learning and teaching, and teachers should take them into account particularly in teaching writing (Dewaele et al., 2019). Those previous studies shared similar findings that motivation and self-efficacy positively correlated with the students' writing performance. The higher motivation and self-efficacy level the students have, the better the students' writing performance is. However, writing anxiety has a negative correlation with the students' writing performance. The higher the students' anxiety level, the worse the students' performance is (Erkan & Saban, 2011; Gibriel, 2019; Zhang, 2011). Those factors may affect the students' attitude towards writing performance either positively or negatively.

Methodology

Research design

This study employed a quantitative design. It examined the level of students' self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and anxiety. Additionally, this study compared the level of the affective factors across proficiency levels by using statistical analysis to see the difference. Also, it measured the contribution of each factor to the students' writing performance in an online class. The examination of the relationship between each factor with the students' writing performance in an online class will also be discussed.

Participants

The participants were first-year students in a private university in Bangladesh. They were informed about the purpose of the study and agreed to participate in this study by returning the online form. Out of 114 students who registered for the paragraph writing course, only 81 students were included because they completed all four adopted questionnaires, such as Self-Efficacy for Writing Scale, Academic Writing Motivation, Writing Attitude, and Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory and also the writing task. The paragraph writing course is a four-credit course in which the students were required to analyze paragraph models. They were also introduced to paragraph structure (topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence) and to text genres (descriptive, report, and narrative texts). There were 18 males and 63 females aged between 17-25 years old. The students were divided into three proficiency levels based on their writing scores. Following the scoring distribution of the university, the range of score between 80-100 is categorized as high achievers, 70-79 as moderate achievers, and 0-69 as low achievers. Out of 81, 31 students are categorized into high-proficient students, 33 students (moderate-proficient students), and 17 students (low-proficient-students).

Instruments

Four close-ended questionnaires were used to measure the students' affective factors. The questionnaires were on a 5-Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). A 16-item Self-Efficacy for Writing Scale (SEWS) adopted from Bruning et al. (2013) was distributed to obtain data about the students' writing self-efficacy. An Academic Writing Motivation questionnaire by Payne (2012) was distributed to explore the students' motivation level. Out of 37, two items (*i.e.*, *I enjoy writing literary analysis papers* and *I enjoy writing a research paper*) were excluded because they are irrelevant to the writing task given to first-year students. In addition, a Writing Attitude questionnaire (13 items) developed by Johnson (2013) was used to examine the students' attitude levels. A 22-item Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) by Cheng (2004) was used to measure students' anxiety levels. The last instrument used was the students' descriptive paragraph writing score. The students' scores were used to determine their proficiency levels. There were some aspects of writing (*i.e.*, content, mechanics, vocabulary, organization, and grammar) to estimate their final scores.

Procedures

The data collection began by inviting students to fill out a consent form. To ensure the data were valid, they were given a week to complete a total of 94 items from four different types of questionnaires. For practical reasons, the questionnaires were distributed online via *Google form*. To group the students according to writing proficiency, they were assigned to compose a descriptive paragraph.

Their scores of the descriptive writing draft defined their levels of writing proficiency. The scoring was done by two raters who have 3-7 years of experience in teaching writing. The scoring criteria involved content, organization, grammar, and mechanics. At this time, students had attended three weeks of the online writing course. This study was conducted in the Writing II course, which focuses on descriptive writing. It is a four-credit course with two meetings per week. The teachers used different applications to deliver the materials and to give feedback, such as *Zoom* and *WhatsApp*.

Data analysis

To measure the level of affective factors, descriptive statistics was used to analyse data from four questionnaires. The measurement range of self-efficacy, motivation, and attitude was analysed using the following criteria: 1.00-2.49 (low), 2.50-3.49 (medium), and high (3.50 - 5.00). (Oxford, 1990). To compare the affective factors across proficiency levels, an analysis using One-Way ANOVA was performed. Since there were three proficiency levels, this analysis would show the difference among them. In addition, the *Pearson-product moment correlation* was used to see the contribution of the four factors to the students' writing performance. The relationship between students' affective factors and their writing achievement would be revealed by employing this statistical analysis.

Results

The level of students' self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and anxiety across proficiency levels

The first research question is intended to determine the students' self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and writing anxiety levels across proficiency levels (high, moderate, and low). The data obtained from the questions were analyzed using ANOVA in which the results can be seen in Table 1.

Group Level	Self-efficacy		Motivation		Attitude		Anxiety	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
High	3.25	.320	3.55	.333	3.32	.373	3.28	.359
Moderate	3.49	.491	3.74	.476	3.36	.367	3.26	.410
Low	3.20	.530	3.28	.458	3.28	.394	3.30	.378
Average	3.31	.447	3.52	.422	3.32	.378	3.28	0.38

Table 1: Level of affective factors across proficiency levels

Table 1 showed that both high and moderate proficiency students, motivation is the highest of the four factors. Students with high proficiency level tended to have the highest motivation (3.55), but attitude (3.32), anxiety (3.28), and self-efficacy (3.25) were located in moderate level. Meanwhile, students who had a moderate level of writing proficiency had high motivation (3.74), but self-efficacy (3.49), attitude (3.36) and anxiety (3.26) towards the writing process were in moderate levels. In contrast with the other proficiency groups, low proficient students have medium affective factors. It can be seen from the means indicated below 3.50.

The significant difference of each variable (self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and writing anxiety) across proficiency levels

The second research question is intended to compare students' self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and writing anxiety levels across proficiency levels (high, moderate, and low). The result of the data analysis can be seen in the following table.

Affective Factors	F	Sig. (2-tailed)
Self-efficacy	3.317	.041
Motivation	6.458	.003
Attitude	.257	.774
Anxiety	.086	.917

Table 2: Comparison of students' affective factors across proficiency level

Table 2 shows that students' self-efficacy is significantly different across proficiency levels because the *p-value* (.041) is lower than the level of significant .05. Furthermore, students' motivation in online writing classes also showed significantly different across proficiency levels; the *p-value* .003 is lower than .05. In contrast, two variables (attitude and writing anxiety) do not show any significant difference across proficiency levels because both *p values* (.774 and .917) are higher than the level of significant .05.

Contribution of self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and writing anxiety to students' writing performance

The third research question measures how much self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and writing anxiety contribute to proficiency levels performance. A statistical analysis using multiple regressions was employed. The results are presented below:

Affective Factors	N	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Self-efficacy	81	.113	.317
Motivation	81	.258*	.020
Attitude	81	.081	.470
Anxiety	81	.015	.891

Table 3: Contribution of affective factors on writing performance

The table above reveals that only motivation (.020) was reported to contribute significantly to the students' writing performance among four affective factors. Meanwhile, self-efficacy, attitude and writing anxiety did not contribute to students' writing performance across proficiency levels. The results showed that all the *p-values* are higher than the level of significance .05.

Discussion

The overall findings showed that students of all proficiency levels have a moderate level of self-efficacy, motivation, attitude and writing anxiety. However, students with high and moderate proficiency levels have high motivation levels. In this sense, motivation is the key factor making a difference, as stated by Shroff et al. (2007) and Aguilera-Hermida (2020); intrinsic motivation serves as the basic characteristic that online learners should have. Furthermore, Shroff and Vogel (2009) compared the motivation levels of online and on-campus undergraduate and postgraduate students. The results showed that online learners were found to be more motivated than on campus. Motivation is indeed the "engine of learning" (Paris & Turners 1994). Thus, teachers need to make sure that their students are always motivated in developing their writing competence.

The findings of the second research question discovering significant differences in students' self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and anxiety across proficiency levels showed that self-efficacy and motivation across proficiency levels were significantly different, indicating the important role of self-efficacy and motivation to achieve high proficiency in an online writing course. Meanwhile, the attitude and anxiety showed no significant difference across proficiency levels indicating that students of all proficiency levels have similar attitudes and experience anxiety in an online writing course. The findings of this study do not support the finding of a study conducted by Kirmızı and Kirmızı (2015) that compared the levels of self-efficacy among second-year, third-year, and fourth-year of study. In the present study, low proficiency students had the lowest self-efficacy (low-moderate). From Pratama's et al. (2018) findings, it can be said that self-efficacy does not determine students' writing performance. They found that students with a high degree of self-efficacy have fair and poor writing performance. Furthermore, the current study results are in contrast with Zarei and Zarei (2015), who reported that students' self-esteem and self-efficacy are not significantly different across proficiency levels. These contrast findings might occur due to the different learning settings, in which the present study was conducted in an online environment. In online learning, motivation plays a vital role in enhancing and maintaining their learning achievement (Keller, 2008). Simultaneous analysis revealed that self-efficacy, attitude, and anxiety do not contribute to students' writing performance. Meanwhile, motivation gives the most contribution to the students' writing performance. The finding of our study is contrary to some previous studies (Pratama et al., 2018; Troia et al., 2012; Woodrow, 2011; Zhang & Guo, 2013). They revealed that motivation did not contribute to the students' writing performance. Furthermore, Hashemian and Heidari (2013) in a deeper analysis examined the correlation of anxiety, instrumental and integrative motivation, and writing performance. They found that instrumental motivation is not significantly correlated with writing performance, while integrative motivation contributes to the success in L2 academic writing. However, this present study did not classify the types of motivation

specifically. From our analysis, it can be interpreted that the higher motivation the students possess, the better score they will obtain. It is in line with what was revealed by Keller (2008). He argued that motivation becomes the most crucial factor in determining students' learning success.

The discussion yields the pedagogical implication that teachers are encouraged to create an innovative and motivating learning atmosphere so that students' learning outcomes can be successfully achieved. They are urgently required to consider some factors that may hinder online learning, such as low motivation (Keller, 2008), the feeling of being alone (Paulus & Scherff, 2008), and lack of technological knowledge (Hara & King, 2003). It is also important to point out that studying at home is not easy because students have to divide their focus with other duties (Keller, 1999).

Conclusion

This study identified the level of students' self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and anxiety across proficiency levels, examined the significant difference between the four affective aspects across students' proficiency levels, and revealed the correlation between the four aspects to students' writing performance in an online class. The results showed that the level of self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and writing anxiety varied across proficiency levels. The highly motivated students who have moderate attitude, anxiety, and self-efficacy levels tend to have high proficiency levels in writing performance. Besides, only two affective factors, self-efficacy and motivation, have significant differences across students' proficiency levels. It can be concluded that only motivation is one of the four affective factors reported to contribute significantly to students' writing performance.

This study implies that among the four affective factors, motivation provides the most contribution to the students' writing performance, and regarding implications, teachers may wish to provide any kind of strategies in increasing students' motivation. For example, giving students responsibility to complete their writing tasks and offering rewards for those who get good scores. Our findings point to a need for teachers to help students activate students' motivation strategies. It is obvious that students need to discover their intrinsic motivation so that they can generate their motivation in writing. Therefore, teachers are expected to create a motivating learning environment to boost students' self-efficacy, leading them to have a more positive attitude and reduce their anxiety in an online writing class.

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