The Impact of Writing Anxiety, Writing Achievement Motivation, and Writing Self-Efficacy on Writing Performance: A Correlational Study of Iraqi Tertiary EFL Learners

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Abstract
Previous studies have examined learner factors such as anxiety, self-efficacy, and achievement motivation in ESL/EFL (English as a second language/English as a foreign language) writing. Studies have affirmed that self-efficacy and achievement motivation could enhance writing performance, whereas anxiety may hinder writing achievement. This study aimed to examine individual differences in Iraqi EFL learners’ writing anxiety, writing self-efficacy, and writing achievement motivation in the Iraqi EFL context. A quantitative approach, specifically the correlational design, was employed to examine the abovementioned relationships. The sample of the study comprised 100 Iraqi undergraduate students majoring in English language from two Iraqi public universities. Data were collected via four instruments: three questionnaires, namely, Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), Writer Self-Perception Scale (WSPS) and Achievement Goal Questionnaire (AGQ), and one descriptive writing task. The findings of this study discovered that the higher the writing anxiety level, the poorer the writing performance, whereas the higher the writing self-efficacy and writing achievement motivation level, the better the writing performance. The findings of this study also indicated that both writing self-efficacy and writing anxiety, and writing anxiety and writing achievement motivation were negatively correlated, whereas writing self-efficacy and writing achievement motivation were significantly and positively correlated. This study suggests that these factors need to be taken into consideration in EFL writing instruction to facilitate the teaching and learning process of EFL writing, which in turn would help enhance the EFL undergraduates’ writing ability.

Keywords
Iraqi EFL learners, writing achievement motivation, writing anxiety, writing self-efficacy

Introduction
Writing is considered a complex task for many ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign language) writers because of its intricate nature coupled with the lack of vocabulary in the writers’ repertoire and the handicap in their grammatical knowledge of the English language. In this regard, the ESL and EFL writers may not have adequate language at their disposal which thus creates problems for them to write effectively in the foreign language (English) compared with L1 writers who are able to write rather easily as they have automatic and quick access to the nuances of the language. Zailaini et al. (2015), for instance, describe writing as a demanding task, especially for those who come from the EFL/ESL context. Many Arab students from different Middle Eastern countries, who are classified as being part of the EFL context, tend to have difficulties when it comes to acquiring the essential English language skills of speaking, listening, reading, and, notably, writing. The intricacy of writing as a skill that needs to be mastered may raise the EFL students’ anxiety level and demotivate the students to put in effort to accomplish a given writing task, which in turn could lead to a disappointing performance (Erkan & Saban, 2011). Accordingly, when a student finds it difficult to write, his self-confidence, self-efficacy, and motivation may also

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decrease, which further hampers their learning process and performance in writing. Such problems have been ascribed to the lack of hands-on exercises and experience in writing in English (Kirimzi & Kirimzi, 2015). Similar problems are also noted for many Iraqi students in an ESL context with minimal exposure to and use of English, particularly writing in English. This view is endorsed by Sabti (2013) who pointed out that most Iraqi EFL students seem to lack English writing competence, in particular academic writing skills.

In Iraq, English is only used in formal EFL classroom settings where the teachers are native speakers of Arabic language. Consequently, the possibility to learn English formally in the classroom is rather limited. Therefore, Iraqi learners are only able to learn very basic levels of the four skills of English language. More specifically, writing, as stated by Rababah (2002), is “one of the linguistic areas in which students in the secondary cycle commit errors” (p. 4). Iraqi learners might have numerous difficulties when writing in English, such as “misuse of certain words, repetition, parallelism, sentence length, lack of variation and misuse of certain cohesive devices” (Qaddumi, 1995, p. 3). These difficulties are not only in grammar or vocabulary choice but also in the organization of ideas, which would affect the overall writing quality of the learners. However, such difficulties may be overcome if learners show interest in writing and are willing to put in effort to improve their writing. Research has shown that factors such as self-efficacy or motivation are associated with the enhancement of writing ability. For instance, several previously published works related to this topic indicated that such factors are related to the enhancement of EFL writing performance (Chea & Shumow, 2017; Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2015). In effect, these factors do not directly develop learners’ writing ability, but they could assist them to put in greater effort to improve their writing ability (Kahraman, 2012; Pajares & Valiante, 1997).

In other words, such factors seem to exert positive influences on the learners’ performance.

Various studies have investigated writing with anxiety, motivation, and self-efficacy in the ESL and EFL contexts (Armendaris, 2009; Jibreil et al., 2015; Mahyuddin et al., 2006; McAllister, 2014; Salem & Al Dyiar, 2014; Y. Zhang & Guo, 2013). However, to date, there is hardly any study in the Arab world, especially with Iraqi students, which has examined writing with the three aforementioned factors in one single study. Addressing this gap in the literature, this study focused on the relationships between writing anxiety, writing achievement motivation, and writing self-efficacy among Iraqi EFL undergraduate learners.

It is deemed necessary to further examine individual differences in anxiety, self-efficacy, and achievement motivation as well as their relationship in EFL settings. This study, therefore, aims to identify the levels of writing anxiety, writing achievement motivation, and writing self-efficacy of Iraqi EFL undergraduate students and to examine writing performance across levels of the aforementioned variables. Added to this, this study seeks to determine the interrelationship between writing anxiety, writing achievement motivation, and writing self-efficacy among Iraqi undergraduate students. Based on this, six hypotheses were generated and presented as follows:

H01: There is no significant difference in writing performance across the different levels (low, moderate, and high) of writing anxiety.

H02: There is no significant difference in writing performance across the different levels (low, moderate, and high) of writing achievement motivation.

H03: There is no significant difference in writing performance across the different levels (low, moderate, and high) of writing self-efficacy.

H04: There is no significant relationship between writing anxiety and writing achievement motivation.

H05: There is no significant relationship between writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy.

H06: There is no significant relationship between writing anxiety and writing achievement motivation.

Literature Review

Affective factors, such as achievement motivation, self-efficacy, and anxiety, play a considerable role in influencing EFL writing in various studies. Several academics reported that a lack of confidence, achievement motivation, self-efficacy, and feeling of anxiety have been identified as negatively influencing EFL writing performance (Erkan & Saban, 2011; Pajares & Valiante, 2006; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016; Senko, 2016). Such studies have mostly affirmed that writing achievement motivation and writing self-efficacy may greatly boost writing performance, whereas writing anxiety could highly influence writing ability in negative ways. In other words, such factors play a considerable role in students’ behavior that could lead to either a good or a disappointing performance.

Anxiety is viewed to be a major factor affecting academic performance by a considerable number of researchers (Horwitz et al., 1986; Jibreil et al., 2015; Zrekat et al., 2016). In particular, anxiety has been found to have an adverse effect on the writing outcome of L1 learners (Csiszer & Piniel, 2013; Daly & Miller, 1975; Leki, 1990). Sabti et al. (2016), for instance, introduced “anxiety as the major factor in the decline of students’ academic achievement in the EFL/ESL contexts” (p. 208). In addition, anxiety is related to other elements, such as self-efficacy, motivation, as well as attitudes toward writing. Kirmizi and Kirmizi (2015), for instance, stress that “anxiety gives rise to de-motivation and discouragement on the part of the students and as a result they may develop negative self-efficacy and attitudes towards writing” (p. 57). It can be said that anxiety is deemed as detrimental to students’ writing performance, specifically in EFL contexts such as the Arab EFL context.
In fact, the term anxiety is defined as a learner’s experience of feelings of uneasiness, worries, and physiological responses while performing a task for a specific language skill such as speaking, reading, or writing (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). In terms of anxiety in writing, Erkan and Saban (2011) have defined it as “the tendency of a person to avoid the process of writing-particularly when it is to be evaluated in some way” (p. 181). However, writing anxiety is defined in this study as a situational aspect, which refers to the feelings of worries accompanied by reactions as in excessive sweating, pounding of the heart, and negative expectations as well as maladaptive behaviors of a learner’s experience while performing a particular writing task at a given time and place. The maladaptive behaviors are described as a lack of confidence whereby individual interpret the errors they make as an indication of inability and feeling of anxiety that could lead them to withdraw effort and avoid challenge, which eventually undermine the quality of the learning process.

Among other factors that affect EFL writing are motivation and self-efficacy, which play a vital role in EFL writing performance in particular and learning English in the EFL context generally (Brown, 2007; Du, 2009; Yusuf, 2011; Z. J. Zhang et al., 2015). Numerous studies found that writing outcomes are positively correlated with achievement motivation and self-efficacy in an academic setting (Csizér & Piniel, 2013; Pajares & Johnson, 1994). Thus, it is imperative to make individuals aware of writing achievement motivation and writing self-efficacy as they could immensely influence their willingness to accomplish a task that is related to writing.

In this study, achievement motivation is defined as an individual’s desire to perform satisfactorily to have an inner feeling of personal achievement (Elias et al., 2010). In other words, achievement motivation is a significant and positive factor for an individual’s academic performance. A study undertaken by Elliot and Church (1997) revealed that there is often a positive relationship between achievement motivation and individuals’ academic performances. This view is endorsed by Emmanuel et al. (2014) who reported that achievement motivation has a significant and positive impact on academic performance. In other words, achievement motivation is found to be a dynamic and powerful predictor of an individual’s performance (Chea & Shumow, 2017). Added to this, a study carried out by Elias et al. (2010) on achievement motivation and self-efficacy revealed that high levels of achievement motivation and self-efficacy often drive individuals to put in a great effort in a task they believe in to accomplish their objectives.

Self-efficacy, which is also examined in this study, is described as a person’s beliefs about his capabilities that play a crucial role in motivating human behavior (Bandura, 1997). In other words, self-efficacy indicates a vaster predictive power over the way an individual behaves. A strong sense of writing self-efficacy denotes a strong sense of confidence for a task of writing. An individual with high self-efficacy in writing may have more interest and make more effort to perform a writing task (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016; Schunk & Usher, 2012). High self-efficacy can drive an individual to demonstrate vaster perseverance and resilience when facing difficulty during performing a writing task. A study conducted by Pajares and Johnson (1994) reported that self-efficacy is often found to be a stronger predictor among all the motivational constructs. Thus, self-efficacy can play a principal role in predicting writing performance. Another study, which was undertaken by Parilah et al. (2011) on 120 Malaysian ESL learners, revealed that learners showed a moderate level of self-efficacy, which paralleled their moderate level of writing performance. It can be said that individuals with low self-efficacy either make a small amount of effort to approach a given task or try to avoid it. On the contrary, those with high self-efficacy tend to apply rigorous effort, search for new solutions, and persevere when facing difficulties (İnceçay & Genç, 2014). In short, self-efficacy denotes a strong and positive predictor of individuals’ success in performing a task such as a particular writing task.

Methods

Research Design

A correlational design was employed in this study. The purpose of correlational design application is to assess relationships, consistency, and prediction among variables (Ary et al., 2010). Precisely, a correlational study seeks to assess patterns of relationship among variables in one group of participants. Based on this, this study examines the interrelationships between writing anxiety, writing achievement motivation, and writing self-efficacy. The factors of writing anxiety, writing achievement motivation, and writing self-efficacy are measured by five Likert-type scale questionnaires in which Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) developed by Cheng (2004), Writer Self-Perception Scale (WSPS) of Bottomley et al. (1998), and Achievement Goal Questionnaire (AGQ) developed by Elliot and Church (1997) were used for data collection in this study (see the “Questionnaires” section for more information).

Participants

The sample of this study comprised 100 Iraqi freshmen (first year university students) majoring in English language who were from different colleges, namely, College of Education, College of Arts, and College of Education for women. They were generally intermediate level students studying EFL at Baghdad University, who were chosen based on a centralized test that is given to pre-university students before their entrance to tertiary level. The total number of the intermediate level students in English language major in Baghdad University was around 160 students. Based on Krejcie and
Morgan (1970), 100 out of 160 students were randomly selected for this study based on the simple random sampling technique. Elementary or advanced level students were excluded to control for the factor of English language proficiency.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected via four instruments, namely, a descriptive writing task and three different questionnaires: SLWAI (Cheng, 2004), WSPS (Bottomley et al., 1998), and AGQ (Elliot & Church, 1997), which are described below.

Questionnaires

Several adapted questionnaires were used in this study. First, Cheng’s (2004) questionnaire, SLWAI, was used to measure the students’ attitudes, beliefs, and anxious feelings toward EFL writing. The SLWAI consists of three sub-components, namely, cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior anxiety. Second, Elliot and Church’s (1997) questionnaire, AGQ, was adapted to elicit the students’ self-perception of writing ability which has five subcomponents rather than three including general progress, specific progress, observational comparison, social feedback, and physiological states constituting the writing self-efficacy construct.

These aforementioned questionnaires have well-established reliability and validity in the literature. Kırmızı and Kırmızı (2015) pointed out that SLWAI is considered as being “highly reliable and valid by means of correlation and factor analysis” (p. 59). Similarly, Mastan and Maarof (2014) reported that WSPS of Bottomley et al. (1998) has “strong reliability and validity characteristics for each scale where Cronbach’s alpha reliability for Specific Progress (SPR), .89; Observational Comparison (OC), .90; Social Feedback (SF), .87; and Physiological States (PS), .91” (p. 2362). As for the AGQ, the results from Cronbach’s alpha measure revealed that the three subscales of AGQ attained moderate to high levels of internal consistency (Cronbach’s α = .91, .89, and .77, respectively), which indicates that AGQ is a reliable and valid questionnaire (Elliot & Church, 1997, p. 223). The questionnaires, which were rated using the five-level Likert-type scale from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5), were distributed to the students during their regular class times.

In this study, the three aforementioned questionnaires were translated into Arabic language to make the participants understand the items of the questionnaires more easily and would also be useful for future researchers in the same area of study. A PhD in English language studies with 25 years of experience translated the instruments into Arabic language. The instruments were then read by three Arabic lecturers. The comments by the lecturers were scrutinized for necessary amendments. Furthermore, the translations were also compared to ensure that the Arabic EFL students easily comprehended the items. The instruments were back-translated from Arabic to English language by an associate professor with more than 20 years of teaching in English language. Before finalizing the translation, any discrepancies between the two versions were discussed. It was ensured that the final translated version was parallel to the original version of the instruments. Supplemental Appendices A to C present the both versions (Arabic and English) of these three questionnaires.

Writing Task

A descriptive writing task was employed in this study to gauge the students’ writing performance. In this writing task, the students are required to write 200- to 250-word essays for which the topic was selected from the writing topics of the 2015 English Proficiency Level Test (EPLT) administered to the Iraqi pre-university students as an entry requirement to tertiary education in the field of English language. The participants were required to complete the writing task within 45 min. The rationale for using the descriptive writing task was its relevance to the Iraqi pedagogical context.

The students’ essays were evaluated using the adapted writing composition scale of Jacobs et al. (1981) by Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1992). The ESL composition profile focuses on five criteria, namely, content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. The total score obtained on the writing task is used as a measure of the students’ overall English writing ability. It was evaluated and scored holistically based on a 1- to 100-point scale before which it was analytically scored on five differently weighted criteria:

- **Content**: knowledge of subject; development of thesis; coverage of topic; relevance of details; substance; quantity of details.
- **Organization**: fluency of expression; clarity in the statement of ideas; support; organization of ideas; sequencing and development of ideas.
- **Grammar**: use of sentence structures and constructions; accuracy and correctness in the use of agreement, number, tense, word order, articles, pronouns, prepositions, and negation.
- **Vocabulary**: range; accuracy of word/idiom choice; mastery of word forms; appropriateness of register; effectiveness in the transmission of meaning.
- **Mechanics of writing**: conventions of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraph indentation, and so on.

Each criterion contains four bands that are labeled as excellent to very good, good to average, fair to poor, and very poor.
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Data Analysis

The analysis of the data for this study was performed in two stages. The first stage of analysis involved descriptive statistics to identify the levels (e.g., low, moderate, high) of the factors, namely, writing anxiety, writing achievement motivation, and writing self-efficacy, of the Iraqi EFL undergraduate students dependent on the subjects’ responses to the three different aforementioned questionnaires. This categorization was applied based on the following cutoff points shown in Table 1.

The second stage of analysis used inferential statistics, namely, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (PPMCC). Although the first analysis was utilized to examine whether there are significant differences in writing performance across the levels for each factor, namely, writing anxiety, writing achievement motivation, and writing self-efficacy, the latter examines the interrelationships between the three aforementioned factors.

Findings

Before hypothesis testing, reliability and normality tests were carried out to assess the consistency and validity of the questionnaires. This section aims to test the six hypotheses that were generated for this study. The results are divided into three subsections, namely, identification of the levels of the three aforementioned factors, evaluation of writing performance across the levels of the three aforementioned factors, and examining the interrelationships between writing anxiety, writing achievement motivation, and writing self-efficacy.

Levels of Writing Anxiety, Writing Achievement Motivation, and Writing Self-Efficacy

This subsection discusses the levels of writing anxiety, writing achievement motivation, and writing self-efficacy of Iraqi EFL undergraduate students.

Levels of writing anxiety. Table 2 summarizes the results according to the number and percentage of Iraqi EFL students. It can be seen from Table 2 that slightly more than half the total number of Iraqi EFL students (54.0%) had high writing anxiety followed by those whose anxiety was moderate (34.0%) and only a small percentage with low writing anxiety (12.0%). This indicates that a majority of them had moderate to high writing anxiety, which would be impediment for students to put in greater effort to enhance their writing performance.

Levels of writing achievement motivation. Table 3 presents the three levels of the students’ writing achievement motivation. As shown in Table 3, the results display that more than half the total number of Iraqi EFL students (63.0%) have a low writing achievement motivation level followed by a small percentage (30.0%) having moderate writing achievement motivation level. However, those categorized as having high writing achievement motivation were only a small minority (7.0%). The high percentage of Iraqi EFL students with low writing achievement motivation suggests that the students would not be very willing to accomplish a given task, which is something not encouraging.

Levels of writing self-efficacy. Table 4 presents the results of the descriptive analysis by indicating the number and percentage of the participants for each level. As shown in Table 4, more than half the total number of Iraqi EFL undergraduate students (59.0%) had a low level of writing self-efficacy,
followed by 37.0% with moderate writing self-efficacy and a very small percentage (4.0%) with high writing self-efficacy. In comparison with the level of writing achievement motivation, the level of writing self-efficacy exhibits a similar pattern, in that a majority of the Iraqi students had a low level of writing self-efficacy. However, regarding the difference in writing self-efficacy, the percentage of students having a moderate level of writing self-efficacy is slightly higher. This indicates that Iraqi EFL learners with a low sense of writing self-efficacy may lack confidence and are worried about their writing performance.

### Writing Performance Across the Levels of Writing Anxiety, Writing Achievement Motivation, and Writing Self-Efficacy

Writing performance across the three levels of writing anxiety. This section presents the result of the first hypothesis which examines whether there are any significant differences in writing performance between the three levels (low, moderate, and high) of writing anxiety. To test the hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. Table 5 shows the results of the ANOVA comparing the Iraqi EFL undergraduate students’ writing performance across the three levels of writing anxiety, which leads to either rejection or failure to reject \( H_{01} \) based on the significance level (\( p \) value).

Table 5. Analysis of Variance of Writing Performance Across Levels of Writing Anxiety.

| Comparisons          | Sum of squares | df | Mean square   | F       | Sig. |
|----------------------|----------------|----|---------------|---------|------|
| Between groups       | 5,103.435      | 2  | 2,551.717     | 48.268  | .000 |
| Within groups        | 5,127.955      | 97 | 52.866        |         |      |
| Total                | 10,231.390     | 99 |               |         |      |

Based on Table 5, the results show that the significance value (.000) is smaller than \( \alpha \) at the .05 level of significance; therefore, the null hypothesis (\( H_{01} \)) is rejected. It can be concluded that there is a significant difference in writing performance between the three levels of writing anxiety. Table 6 presents the results of the Tukey post hoc comparison test to further examine the mean of each level and whether they are significantly different from each other.

As shown in Table 6, there is a statistically significant difference in writing performance between the groups of high and low levels (\( p = .000 \)), as well as between the groups of low and moderate levels (\( p = .000 \)). Similarly, there is also a significant difference in writing performance between the groups of high and moderate levels (\( p = .000 \)). To further examine these results, the mean scores of the groups with different levels of writing anxiety are shown in Table 7.

It can be seen from Table 7 that the students who had high writing anxiety demonstrated poor quality of writing performance (\( M = 51.2, SD = 8.33 \)), whereas those who attained a moderate level of anxiety showed average performance in writing (\( M = 62.11, SD = 5.17 \)). As for those with a low level of anxiety, they recorded good writing performance (\( M = 71.16, SD = 7.14 \)). Based on these findings, the Iraqi EFL students with a high level of writing anxiety had reasonably low writing performance. The findings of this study are supportive of some academics’ belief that high anxiety can direct toward negative achievement (Cheng, 2004; Sabti et al., 2016).

Table 6. Multiple Comparisons of the Means of Anxiety Levels Using the Tukey Honestly Significant Difference Test.

| Anxiety level        | Anxiety level   | Mean difference | SE   | Sig. |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------|------|
| Low anxiety          | Moderate anxiety| 9.04902         | 2.44138 | .001 |
|                      | High anxiety    | 19.96296        | 2.32044 | .000 |
| Moderate anxiety     | Low anxiety     | −9.04902        | 2.44138 | .001 |
|                      | High anxiety    | 10.91394        | 1.59181 | .000 |
| High anxiety         | Low anxiety     | −19.96296       | 2.32044 | .000 |
|                      | Moderate anxiety| −10.91394       | 1.59181 | .000 |

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of Writing Performance Across Levels of Writing Anxiety.

| Groups of writing anxiety | N   | M (0–100) | SD  |
|--------------------------|-----|-----------|-----|
| Low                      | 12  | 71.16     | 7.14 |
| Moderate                 | 34  | 62.11     | 5.17 |
| High                     | 54  | 51.20     | 8.33 |
| Total                    | 100 | 57.31     | 10.16 |
Writing performance across the three levels of writing achievement motivation. The second hypothesis examines whether there are any significant differences in writing performance between the three levels (low, moderate, and high) of writing achievement motivation. Table 8 shows the results of the ANOVA of writing performance across the three levels of writing achievement motivation, which leads to either reject or fail to reject H02 based on the significance level (p value).

A one-way ANOVA was also conducted to identify any differences in writing performance across the three levels of writing achievement motivation. As shown in Table 8, the significance value (.000) is smaller than α at the .05 level of significance. As the significance value (.000) is smaller than α at the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis (H02) is also rejected. It can be concluded that there is a significant difference in writing performance between the three levels of writing achievement motivation.

As shown in Table 8, the significance value (.000) is smaller than α at the .05 level of significance. As the significance value (.000) is smaller than α at the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis (H02) is also rejected. It can be concluded that there is a significant difference in writing performance between the three levels of writing achievement motivation. Table 9 displays the results of the Tukey post hoc comparison test which compares the means of the different levels of writing achievement motivation.

Based on the results shown in Table 9, there is a statistically significant difference in writing performance between the groups of high and low levels (p = .263). To further examine the results of post hoc comparisons, the mean scores of the groups with different levels of writing achievement motivation are shown in Table 10.

Writing performance across the three levels of writing self-efficacy. The third hypothesis examines whether there are any significant differences in writing performance between the three levels (low, moderate, and high) of writing self-efficacy. A one-way ANOVA was also run to test this hypothesis. Table 11 displays the results of the ANOVA of writing performance across the three levels of writing self-efficacy, which leads to either reject or fail to reject H03 based on the significance level (p value).

Based on Table 11, the results demonstrate that the significance value (.945) is greater than α at .05. As the
As shown in Table 12, although there are three levels (high, moderate, and low), students’ performance in writing was not different based on the mean value of writing performance scores. The students with high self-efficacy showed poor performance in writing \((M = 59.00, SD = 17.47)\) followed by those whose self-efficacy was moderate \((M = 57.83, SD = 9.47)\) and low \((M = 56.86, SD = 10.21)\).

### Table 11. Analysis of Variance of Writing Performance Across Levels of Writing Self-Efficacy.

| Comparisons         | Sum of squares | df  | Mean square | F    | Sig.  |
|----------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|------|-------|
| Between groups       | 11.984         | 2   | 5.992       | .057 | .945  |
| Within groups        | 10,219.406     | 97  | 105.355     |      |       |
| Total                | 10,231.390     | 99  |             |      |       |

### Table 12. Descriptive Statistics of Writing Performance Across Levels of Writing Self-Efficacy.

| Groups of writing self-efficacy | N  | M (0–100) | SD |
|---------------------------------|----|-----------|----|
| Low                             | 59 | 56.86     | 10.21 |
| Moderate                        | 37 | 57.83     | 9.47  |
| High                            | 4  | 59.00     | 17.47 |
| Total                           | 100| 57.31     | 10.16 |

### Table 13. Descriptive Analysis of Writing Anxiety, Writing Self-Efficacy, and Writing Achievement Motivation.

| Factor                           | M    | SD   | N |
|----------------------------------|------|------|---|
| Writing achievement motivation   | 2.79 | 0.438| 100|
| Writing self-efficacy            | 2.84 | 0.553| 100|
| Writing anxiety                  | 3.68 | 0.412| 100|

significance value (.945) is greater than \(\alpha\) at the .05 level of significance, we failed to reject the null hypothesis \((H_0)_3\). It can be concluded that there are no significant differences in writing performance between the three levels of writing self-efficacy. As there are no significant differences in writing performance across the different levels (low, moderate, and high) of writing self-efficacy, the Tukey post hoc comparison test was not reported. However, Table 12 shows the descriptive statistics of writing performance across levels of writing self-efficacy.

As shown in Table 12, although there are three levels (high, moderate, and low), students’ performance in writing was not different based on the mean value of writing performance scores. The students with high self-efficacy showed poor performance in writing \((M = 59.00, SD = 17.47)\) followed by those whose self-efficacy was moderate \((M = 57.83, SD = 9.47)\) and low \((M = 56.86, SD = 10.21)\).

### Interrelationship Between Writing Anxiety, Writing Achievement Motivation, and Writing Self-Efficacy

To addresses hypotheses 4 to 6, Table 13 shows the average levels of writing achievement motivation, writing self-efficacy, and writing anxiety of Iraqi EFL undergraduate students.

Based on Table 13, the results show that there were low levels for both factors (writing achievement motivation: \(M = 2.79, SD = 0.438\); writing self-efficacy: \(M = 2.84, SD = 0.553\)). However, the writing anxiety factor was at a moderate level \((M = 3.68, SD = 0.412)\). The results predict that there may be a significant and positive relationship between writing achievement motivation and writing self-efficacy, yet writing anxiety may be negatively correlated with writing achievement motivation and writing self-efficacy based on the mean of the factors.

To determine whether there is a relationship between writing anxiety, writing achievement motivation, and writing self-efficacy, Pearson correlation coefficients were utilized. Table 14 displays these results.

This study adopted the Rule of Thumb presented by Guilford (1973) to determine and interpret the strength and direction of relationship between the factors (see Supplemental Appendix D). Based on Table 14, a very strong and positive relationship \((r = .785, p < .05)\) was found between writing self-efficacy and writing achievement motivation. Based on these results, the two factors were strongly and positively correlated. As the significance value (.000) is smaller than \(\alpha\) at the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis \((H_{04})\) is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant and positive relationship between writing self-efficacy and writing achievement motivation.

As for the relationship between writing anxiety and the two factors, writing self-efficacy and writing achievement motivation, the results show that writing anxiety is negatively associated with writing self-efficacy, but not significant \((r = -.145, p > .05)\). As the significance value (.149) is greater than \(\alpha\) at the .05 level of significance, we fail to reject
the null hypothesis (H$_{05}$). Therefore, there is no significant relationship between the writing anxiety factor and the writing self-efficacy factor.

Similarly, writing anxiety is also negatively associated with writing achievement motivation and also not significant ($r = -0.017$, $p > .05$). As the significance value (.0869) is greater than $\alpha$ at the .05 level of significance, we also fail to reject the null hypothesis (H$_{06}$). Therefore, there is also no significant relationship between the writing anxiety factor and the writing achievement motivation factor.

**Discussion**

**Writing Performance Across the Three Levels**

This study aimed to identify the writing anxiety, writing achievement motivation, and writing self-efficacy levels of Iraqi EFL undergraduate learners. Based on the findings of this study, Iraqi EFL undergraduate students had a high level of anxiety in writing which could tend to an unsatisfactory writing performance. Based on this evidence, it may be argued that a high level of anxiety makes Iraqi EFL students avoid writing in the target language, and thus this could directly influence their writing performance. In this case, Iraqi EFL students may strive to refrain from any participation to write in English language. Such students believe that it is better to refrain from involving in writing so that their classmates or others do not take any negative impression about their abilities in writing. Added to this, students with a high anxiety level lack confidence in their abilities to write and do not enjoy writing that may often drive them to avoid situations that demand writing.

From a theoretical perspective, a high level of writing anxiety often impedes and leads a learner to a disappointing performance, whereas those with a low level are perceived to achieve better results on tests of writing (Atay & Kurt, 2006; Erkan & Saban, 2011; Pajares, 2003; Senko, 2016). In other words, students with high anxiety in EFL writing try not to approach a writing task as they see it as a threat rather than a challenge and would not be willing to make greater effort to enhance their performance in writing. This view is endorsed by the findings of this study that Iraqi EFL undergraduate students with high writing anxiety showed poor writing performance, whereas those with low anxiety showed better performance in writing. The findings of this study appear completely similar to those of Erkan and Saban’s (2011) study, which affirmed that individuals with high writing anxiety performed poorly in a writing task compared with those with low and moderate writing anxiety who recorded better writing performance.

In relation to writing self-efficacy and writing achievement motivation, this study found that the majority of the Iraqi EFL students had low levels at these two aforementioned factors. This indicates that the negative evaluation, time pressure, and lack of adequate practice to write in English possibly led the Iraqi EFL students to have low levels of these two factors. This finding concurs with the belief that time pressure, negative evaluation of the teacher, and lack of sufficient English writing practice are as the most crucial elements in decreasing the students’ writing achievement motivation and writing self-efficacy and causing their writing anxiety (Elias et al., 2010; Kırmızı & Kırmızı, 2015).

The findings of this study also indicate that the majority of Iraqi EFL students, who were in the low category of achievement motivation, are not willing to strive hard. The unwillingness to face challenges refers to a setback they need to overcome. In other words, the Iraqi EFL students could be adversely oriented, not confident, and have negative beliefs in themselves. This undeniably goes against the achievement motivation theory which postulates that those with a high level of achievement motivation are well oriented, confident, have positive beliefs in themselves, and can achieve their aims positively (Elias et al., 2010; Maehr & Zusho, 2009; Senko, 2016).

In addition, people who have a weak sense of self-efficacy can elicit anxiety and stress that could drive them to a negative behavior. This is in tandem with the view that “people with low self-efficacy may believe that things are more difficult than they really are—a belief that can foster anxiety and stress and leave few choices for how to solve problems” (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016, p. 37). As a result, a low level of self-efficacy can tend to an unsatisfactory performance.

### Table 14. Pearson Correlation Analysis for Anxiety, Self-Efficacy, and Achievement Motivation.

| Factor name     | Achievement motivation | Self-efficacy | Anxiety |
|-----------------|------------------------|---------------|---------|
| Achievement motivation | Pearson correlation  | 1  | .785  | −.017 |
| Sig. (two tailed)      |                        |   | .000  | .869  |
| $N$         |                        | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Self-efficacy | Pearson correlation    | .785 | 1  | −.145 |
| Sig. (two tailed)     |                        | .000 | | .149 |
| $N$         |                        | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Anxiety     | Pearson correlation    | −.017 | −.145 | 1 |
| Sig. (two tailed)     |                        | .869 | .149 | |
| $N$         |                        | 100 | 100 | 100 |
Interrelationship Between Writing Anxiety, Writing Achievement Motivation, and Writing Self-Efficacy

The findings of this study affirmed that anxiety has a significant and negative relationship with self-efficacy. Previously published studies have revealed a negative relationship between a learner’s writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy in both first and second languages (Csizér & Piniel, 2013; Pajares & Valiante, 1997; Singh & Rajalingam, 2012). In this study, writing anxiety is negatively correlated with self-efficacy. Indeed, there are similarity and consensus from the results of this study with studies by other researchers (Csizér & Piniel, 2013; Erkan & Saban, 2011; Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2015; Pajares, 2003). Based on these studies, anxiety is usually negatively correlated with self-efficacy. Therefore, it is important for teachers to work on the self-efficacy factor and to focus on perceptions of learners about their personal competence along with the actual performance. As pointed out by Bandura (2002), self-efficacy is a strong predictor of learners’ competence.

As for the relationship between writing anxiety and writing achievement motivation, the findings of this study demonstrated that writing anxiety is also negatively correlated with writing achievement motivation. In other words, a low level of writing achievement motivation may elicit high writing anxiety and may undermine learners’ performance. The findings of this study are in tandem with the findings of a study undertaken by Csizér and Piniel (2013) that anxiety and achievement motivation are negatively correlated.

However, in this study, there was a significant and positive relationship between self-efficacy and achievement motivation. Pajares (2003) indicated that learners with high scores in writing self-efficacy possessed a high level of writing achievement motivation. In a related move, but during this decade, some recent research also reported that self-efficacy and achievement motivation were significantly and positively correlated (Chea & Shumow, 2017; Csizér & Piniel, 2013; Yusuf, 2011; Z. J. Zhang et al., 2015; Y. Zhang & Guo, 2013). Thus, there is a full agreement between the findings of this study and the findings of the previous relevant studies that self-efficacy is significantly and positively correlated with achievement motivation.

To conclude, the characteristics such as fear of committing mistakes and fear of being negatively evaluated by lecturers and classmates may have led the Iraqi students to have high anxiety and could also lead them to resort to the avoidance approach. Moreover, some physical symptoms also cause the presence of writing anxiety such as sweating, red faces, and silence. Such symptoms were detected by the researcher while performing the writing task. In this case, teachers always need to motivate their students and give them positive feedback to overcome their anxiety.

On the contrary, although Iraqi ESL undergraduate students showed a lower level of writing self-efficacy and writing achievement motivation, these two factors were found to be significant predictors of writing performance (Pajares, 2003; Senko, 2016). In a study, Elias et al. (2010) found that Malaysian university students with high achievement motivation and self-efficacy were well oriented and confident in their ability to do well in the courses they were involved as well as they had positive beliefs about themselves in coping with difficult situations and challenges. Such attributes are very crucial that can contribute to future success. In other words, students with high levels of achievement motivation and self-efficacy are those who have the potential to succeed.

To have such students with high levels of achievement motivation and self-efficacy, Iraqi teachers need to make their students interested in learning English because they would spend most of their time learning and improving their English. Once students are interested in learning English, this will make them work harder and this would, in turn, help them improve their writing ability. In other words, students with such attributes have the tendency to enjoy what they do and when they love what they do, they are more likely to work harder which would, in turn, lead to better writing achievement.

Conclusion

Writing is perceived as both cognitive and an emotional activity; therefore, it is strongly associated with these affective factors: anxiety, self-efficacy, and motivation. The findings of this study emphasize that the affective factors of EFL learning must be nurtured. This study suggests that beliefs of learners regarding their writing capabilities should be fostered by providing positive feedback from teachers and peers to minimize anxiety in writing to a certain extent. In this respect, a study conducted by Atay and Kurt (2006) reported that the peer review process has a good and positive effect on ESL learners’ writing anxiety. Thus, language teachers at tertiary level need to reduce their students’ writing anxiety by supporting the peer review process.

The findings of this study indicated that the Iraqi EFL students, who recorded the high level of writing self-efficacy, showed unsatisfactory writing performance. The social cognitive theory of Bandura (1986), however, states that the self-efficacy factor operates as a significant and positive predictor of students’ academic performance. Bandura (1997) reported that self-efficacy beliefs are mainly established by enactive attainment and individuals can gain confidence upon attempting and completing tasks. Thus, the ability to attain success eventually increases self-confidence, which frequently drives to a positive achievement, whereas self-confidence is vastly reduced by failure.

Although this study has shown insightful findings, there are several limitations. As for Iraqi ESL learners’ anxiety, self-efficacy, and achievement motivation toward writing, it would have been more effective if other factors (i.e., gender)
could have been taken into account. Gender was not examined in this study because of its unequal number of male and female participants. Therefore, future research should examine gender differences concerning learners’ anxiety, self-efficacy, and achievement motivation toward writing in the EFL context. Besides this, this study focused on Iraqi EFL undergraduate students. Hence, the findings of this study may not be generalized to Arab EFL students at other levels of education. Future research may focus on other groups of students within the Arab EFL context which may provide supportive findings to the findings of this research.

**Pedagogical Implications**

The investigation reported in this study indicates the important roles of anxiety, motivation, and self-efficacy in writing. To help students with these affective factors, teachers should assist students in understanding how these affective factors influence EFL writing performance. Hence, it is vital for teachers to be assertive in assisting students to enhance their competence through higher motivation and confidence. Besides, students must be made aware of how they could reduce their anxiety it as may affect their performance. To do so, teachers need to focus on classroom activities such as problem-solving strategies and resolving writing difficulties through group work and group activities.

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**Supplemental Material**

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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