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AN INTERVENTION PROGRAM TO IMPROVE WRITING SELF-EFFICACY IN SECOND LANGUAGE AMONG IMMIGRANT-ADOLESCENTS

Orit Zipora Martinotti (a), Vasile Chiş (b)*
*Corresponding author

(a) Jerusalem Ulpan - School for Hebrew as a Second Language, 2 Dov Yosef Street, Jerusalem, Israel,
orit.martinotti@gmail.com
(b) Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Babes-Bolyai University,
7 Sindicatelor Street, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, vasile.chis@ubbcluj.ro

Abstract

This paper focuses on the investigation of the writing self-efficacy beliefs of immigrant adolescent-students who learn the target country language as a second language (L2). The empirical literature illustrates that, when learning L2, writing is the most complex and challenging for the students and the last skill that they master. However, high writing self-efficacy beliefs in L2 and the instruction of writing strategies in L2, have been found to improve the writing performance. The present study mainly aimed to explore the effect of a writing intervention program on the self-efficacy beliefs of immigrant adolescent-students. The proposed intervention program included explicit instruction of writing an argumentative essay by a teacher qualified to teach L2, as well as practicing the strategy through writing assignments. The research participants were 30 immigrant adolescent-students, living at the center of Israel, who learn Hebrew as L2 in classes designated for learning Hebrew, called in Hebrew "Ulpan". The research method was quantitative and the data were collected by a structured questionnaire pre and post the writing intervention program. The findings indicated a considerable improvement in the self-efficacy beliefs in essay writing, manifested in dimensions examined both separately and together. This paper presents an initial study in Israel that points a spotlight on the writing self-efficacy beliefs of "Ulpan" students. Its findings indicate two main challenges in L2 teaching pedagogy: developing a systemic awareness of improving L2 writing through the instruction of writing strategies and training L2 teachers in writing instruction by suitable writing strategies.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, writing skill, immigrant-adolescents, second language teaching

1. Introduction

This paper presents a stage of a wider doctoral thesis, aiming to explore the effect of a pedagogical intervention program on the second language (L2) writing skills of immigrant adolescent-students. These students have immigrated to the target country, Israel, and are learning the Hebrew language as L2 in designated classes for Hebrew teaching, called in Hebrew "Hebrew *Ulpan*", or in short "*Ulpan*" (Aviad, 2007). The students are required to use writing already from the beginning of their learning in school and in the *Ulpan* (Shalom, 2016).

The empirical stage on which this paper focuses, engages in the level of L2 writing self-efficacy beliefs of the immigrant-adolescents. Their writing self-efficacy beliefs were examined pre and post attending the intervention program that consisted of inculcating an argumentative essay writing strategy and practicing it by means of writing assignments. This approach was adopted since the implementation of learning strategies in writing had been shown to enhance the students' self-efficacy beliefs regarding the acquisition of writing skills in L2 (Kim et al., 2015; Wilby, 2019). Moreover, studies indicate that writing self-efficacy beliefs in L2, predict the writing performance in L2 (e.g., Hetthong & Teo, 2013; Teng et al., 2018).

1.1. Theoretical Background

Writing in L2 is considered the most challenging and complex skill for students (Allen & Corder, 1974; Kustati & Yuhardi, 2014; Manchón, 2017; Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016; Zabihi, 2018), as it is in the students' mother tongue (L1) (Irawati, 2015; Lichtinger & Kaplan, 2016; Santangelo et al., 2007). Furthermore, writing is the last language skill which L2 learners master (Williams, 2012). Writing in L2 intensifies the students' writing challenges, since additional difficulties are added to their difficulties in L1 writing, harming the quality of their writing, such as: inability to generate ideas for writing in L2 (Hyland, 1996); lack of writing approach in L2, limited capabilities in L2, low self-efficacy and motivation, no proactive planning (Dastjerdi & Samian, 2011; Erkan & Saban, 2011; Hammad, 2016); lack of grammatical-linguistic ability (Ghabool et al., 2012); lack of exposure to effective writing strategies (Hamzah & Abdullah, 2009); and emotional discomfort (Hammad, 2016).

At school, students extensively engage in writing throughout the school day (Feder & Majnemer, 2007). Shalom (2016) argues that immigrant adolescent-students are required to write in L2 already at the beginning of their learning in the *Ulpan* classes and in their lessons at school, as math classes. Furthermore, Golan and Amir (2017) underscore the importance of writing skill in the process of the students' L2 learning, in order to attain academic success at school.

Writing self-efficacy beliefs relate to the way individuals perceive their ability to plan and perform writing assignments successfully (Bandura, 1982; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). It also refers to people's perception of their ability to use the set of skills necessary for performing various writing assignments (Pajares & Johnson, 1996). Moreover, according to Bandura (1995), writing self-efficacy beliefs are not static and their sources can be affected and developed.

Writing self-efficacy beliefs in L2 were found as predictors of L2 writing performance (Hetthong & Teo, 2013; Teng et al., 2018; Troia et al., 2013). According to Zabihi (2018), a high level of writing self-

efficacy beliefs, made writers display greater enthusiasm while writing in L2. This was manifested by perseverance in the performance of the writing assignments, extensive efforts invested throughout the assignment, as well as flexibility in overcoming obstacles while completing the writing assignment. Similarly, Hetthong and Teo (2013) found a relationship between students' high writing self-efficacy beliefs and their writing performance in L2. This relationship was demonstrated on both the paragraph level and in the sub-skills, such as vocabulary, grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Brown (2014) stipulates that in the process of L2 learning, strategies are conscious techniques that the learners use in order to solve problems they face while learning. According to Hamzah and Abdullah (2009), the lack of exposure to efficient writing strategies while learning L2, harms the students' writing products. Furthermore, empirical applied studies (e.g., Arjmand, 2012; Manchón, 2011; Shafiee et al., 2013), illustrated that a continuous use of suitable writing strategies, helped L2 learners in overcoming their writing difficulties and learning to write independently and effectively. Yuan et al. (2018) maintain that learning strategies, including writing, should be inculcated to junior high and high school students only by teachers. Moreover, teachers should instruct the writing strategies in an explicit manner (Graham et al., 2013; Graham & Perin, 2007) and practice them in order to improve the students' writing (Bean, 2011; Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009; MacArthur et al., 2015).

2. Problem Statement

The empirical literature illustrates the importance of nurturing the writing self-efficacy. However, studies indicate gaps that are associated with self-efficacy in each of the following aspects:

The relationship between writing self-efficacy beliefs, writing strategies and L2 writing performance has not been sufficiently investigated (Khosravi et al., 2017; Raoofi & Maroofi, 2017);

There are only a few studies that engage in the perception and development of self-efficacy among immigrants, including immigrant-adolescents (Amrani, 2017; Phan, 2013).

This gives rise to the need for exploring the relationship between writing self-efficacy beliefs and learning L2 writing strategies among immigrant-adolescents.

3. Research Questions

The research question that underpins this part of the study is: "To what extent does acquiring and practicing a learning strategy for essay writing, affect immigrant adolescent-students' writing self-efficacy beliefs?"

It was hypothesized that there would be a positive relationship between attending the intervention program and the students' writing self-efficacy beliefs. After completion of the intervention program, there will be an improvement in the scores of the writing self-efficacy beliefs in the dimensions: content, organization and language, examined both separately and combined together.

4. Purpose of the Study

The present study aims to explore the relationship between writing self-efficacy beliefs and learning writing strategies in L2 among immigrant adolescent-students in the Israeli context. In order to accomplish

this goal, an intervention program for learning an essay writing strategy was implemented in Ulpan classes of Hebrew learning as L2 in Israel, during the first half of the academic year 2019-2020.

5. Research Methods

This research was designed as follows.

5.1. Research Population

The research population of the present study consisted of 30 immigrant adolescent-students (N=30), 17 males (56.7%) and 13 females (43.3%). These students were in the 7th – 11th grades and their age ranged between 12-17 years (M=14.39, SD-1.5). They learnt in *Ulpan* classes that belong to one Hebrew-learning school, and these classes were distributed in five different schools at the center of Israel.

The data for this part of the study were collected in 9.2019, before the students attended the intervention program, as well as half a year later, i.e., after completing their attendance at the writing intervention program.

5.2. Research Method and Instrument

The present study used the survey method, based on a quantitative questionnaire that examined the students' writing self-efficacy beliefs. The questionnaire investigated the immigrant adolescent-students' beliefs concerning their writing self-efficacy beliefs. It comprised eight close-ended items, each of them starting with the assertion: "I am certain that…". The respondents had to place themselves on a scale, ranging between 0 (no chance) and 100 (completely certain). The research instrument is based on the questionnaire of Pajares et al. (1999), which was translated into Hebrew and adapted to the Israeli education system by Shir (2002) for the study that she conducted in Israel.

5.3. Procedure

In order to respond to the research question, the empirical procedure comprised four stages according to the following sequence. At the first stage, the research participants responded to the quantitative questionnaire in order to examine their writing self-efficacy beliefs. At the second stage, the students attended an intervention program, in which they learnt a strategy of writing an argumentative essay and practiced essay writing according to this writing strategy. The pedagogy of the writing strategy instruction was based on the rhetorical model "Argumentation and its establishment model" designed by Lichtinger (2008). At the third stage, upon completion of the intervention program, the questionnaire was administered in the same format as at the first stage, according to the method of Bandura (1997). At the end of the data collection stage, a statistical analysis was performed in accordance with the research hypotheses. First, the reliability of the questionnaire items was examined and the descriptive statistics indices were calculated. Then, the research hypotheses were examined and t-test was applied to determine the significance of the differences between the participants' results obtained pre and post the intervention phase.

6. Findings

For the purpose of examining the research hypotheses, a t-test for two collected data was performed. The independent variable was the writing intervention program and the dependent variables were the writing self-efficacy beliefs in the dimensions: content, organization and language, examined both separately and together.

Analysis of the text findings corroborated the research hypotheses. They demonstrated that:

(a) the writing self-efficacy beliefs in the content dimension of the students, after their attendance at the intervention program (M=81.50, SD=7.67), were significantly higher (t(29)=13.18, p<.001), in comparison with their writing self-efficacy beliefs prior to their attendance at the intervention program (M=53.33, SD=12.13);

(b) the writing self-efficacy beliefs in the organization dimension of the students, after their attendance at the intervention program (M=81.67, SD=6.59), were significantly higher (t(29)=11.48, p<.001), in comparison with their writing self-efficacy beliefs prior to their attendance at the intervention program (M=54.44, SD=14.26);

(c) the writing self-efficacy beliefs in the language dimension of the students, after their attendance at the intervention program (M=82.22, SD=7.02), were significantly higher (t(29)= 11.76, p<.001), in comparison with their writing self-efficacy beliefs prior to their attendance at the intervention program (M=58.78, SD=12.67);

(d) the combined writing self-efficacy beliefs of the students, after their attendance at the intervention program (M=81.75, SD=6.29), were significantly higher (t(29)=11.83, p<.001), in comparison with their writing self-efficacy beliefs prior to their attendance at the intervention program (M=56.13, SD=12.92).

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) of the participants' writing self-efficacy beliefs pre and post attending the intervention program (IP)

Pair	Variables	Mean (N=30)	SD
Pair 1	Content post IP	81.50	7.67
	Content pre IP	53.33	12.13
Pair 2	Organization post IP	81.67	6.59
	Organization pre IP	54.44	14.26
Pair 3	Language post IP	82.22	7.02
	Language pre IP	58.78	12.67
Pair 4	Combined post IP	81.75	6.29
	Combined pre IP	56.13	12.92

The findings presented in Table 01 indicate that, after completion of the writing intervention program, the score given by the students to their writing self-efficacy beliefs was higher on average than their score of their writing self-efficacy beliefs pre the intervention program. The higher score was manifested in each of the three dimensions that comprise the general self-efficacy in writing: content, organization and language, as well as in their combination together.

Table 2. Results of the t-test – Significance of the difference between the two measurements in order to examine the research hypotheses

		Paired Samples Test							
		Paired Differences					**Paired t-Test**		
				Std. Error Mean	**95% Confidence Interval of the Difference**		**t value**		
Pair	**Variables**	**Mean**	**SD**		**Lower**	**Upper**		**df**	**Sig.**
Pair 1	Content post IP & Content pre IP	28.17	11.71	2.14	23.80	32.54	13.18	29	.000
Pair 2	Organization post IP & Organization pre IP	27.22	12.99	2.37	22.37	32.07	11.48	29	.000
Pair 3	Language post IP & Language pre IP	23.44	10.92	1.99	19.37	27.52	11.76	29	.000
Pair 4	Combined post IP & Combined pre IP	25.63	11.87	2.17	21.19	30.06	11.83	29	.000

As presented in Table 02, the research hypotheses were corroborated. Statistically significant differences were found between the students' score of their writing self-efficacy beliefs pre- and post-attending the writing intervention program. A t-test of the dimensions that were examined separately and together was positive and on a high statistical significance level.

7. Conclusion

The intervention program proposed by the present study, designed to improve writing in L2, was implemented in *Ulpan* classes for immigrant adolescent-students who learn Hebrew in Israel. The analysis of the findings related to the participants' writing self-efficacy beliefs illustrated a statistically significant relationship between their attendance of the L2 writing intervention program and their writing self-efficacy beliefs. That is, after attending the intervention program that included instruction of a strategy for writing an argumentative essay and practicing it by a qualified teacher, the students scored their writing self-efficacy beliefs significantly higher than pre attending this program. This higher score was manifested in each of the three dimensions: content, organization and language and in their combination together.

The part of the present study that is presented in this paper indicates a research limitation that relates to the appropriate time for using the learning strategy of writing during the L2 teaching process. The present study does not respond to the question whether there are any limitations of using the L2 writing strategies with regard to the L2 learning stage, at which it can more effectively assist the students in writing by means of the learning strategy of writing. Answering this question requires additional studies conducted by the suitable methods.

The intervention program proposed by the present study, yielded encouraging results that illustrated the great potential of using explicit instruction of learning strategies of writing designed to improve L2

writing. This gives rise to a clear need for implementing applied conclusions. These conclusions for the enhancement of L2 writing self-efficacy beliefs among immigrant adolescent-students are effective for the pedagogy of L2 writing instruction both in Israel and abroad. First, there is an initial and necessary need for developing a systemic awareness of improving L2 writing by means of explicit instruction of a writing strategy. Second, we should consider the key role of L2 teachers in the explicit instruction of the writing strategy to their students. Following these moves, it is recommended developing and implementing a designated pedagogical program for training teachers to teach learning strategies for L2 writing.

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