



The Effect of Motivation and Transfer on Foreign Language Writing Performance of Iraqi EFL Students

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Abstract

The main aim of the current study is to identify the factors that predict Second Language Writing (L2 writing) of Iraqi EFL sophomore students at Departments of English in two colleges: College of Arts and College of Education for Humanities at University of Mosul. To achieve this purpose, data were collected through an online survey with a final sample of 116 students, 35 students from College of Arts and 81 students from College of Education for Humanities. This study used prevalidated adapted scales to collect data, where the motivation scale was based on that of, Khazae, Dowlataldadi, Amerian, and Fathi (2020), and the transfer scale relied on that in Alsaghier's study (2020) and Chulak's study (2023). Simple Linear Regression was utilized to analyze the collected data. The results indicated that motivation and transfer were significant predictors of learners' L2 writing performance in both colleges. Gender, however, was not significant in predicting learners' L2 writing achievement. The findings of this study have crucial pedagogical implications theoretically and practically. Theoretically speaking, the results of the current study add new information to the existing literature about the predication relationship between multiple factors like the ones in this study with EFL students' performance in writing. In terms of practical insights, this study is hoped to enlighten instructors about the importance of motivation and transfer in learning writing, the most difficult skill among the four skills, reading, writing, spelling, and listening, writing is the most difficult skill. especially for EFL learners.

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اجنبية تأثير التحفيز و التحويل على أداء الكتابة لطلاب العراقيين المتعلمين اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة

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المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى تحديد العوامل التي تؤثر في كتابة الطلاب العراقيين المتعلمين اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة اجنبية للمرحلة الثانية في قسمي اللغة الإنكليزية لكلية الاداب وكلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية في جامعة الموصل , ولأجل تحقيق هذا الهدف , تم جمع البيانات من خلال استبيان الكتروني و بعينة مقدارها 116 طالبا , 35 طالبا من كلية الآداب و 81 طالبا من كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية . استخدمت هذه

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الدراسة المعايير السائدة لجمع البيانات , وقد تم استخدام (Fathi وAmerian, Dowlataldadi, Khaza (2020) مقياس التحفيز المعتمد من قبل

(2020) Alsagier و (2023) Culack واستخدام مقياس التحويل المعتمد من قبل وتحليل البيانات تم استخدام الانحدار الخطي البسيط . وقد اشارت نتائج الدراسة الى ان التحفيز والتحويل هما مؤثران مهمان لاداء الكتابة للطلاب في كلتا الكليتين . اما بالنسبة لعامل الجنس , فليس له أي تأثير في أداء الكتابة لطلاب المرحلة الثانية لكلتا الكليتين. نتائج هذه الدراسة لها اثار تربوية من الناحية النظرية والتطبيقية . اضافت النتائج معلومات جديدة عن الادبيات المطروقة عن العلاقة بين العوامل المتعددة لاداء الكتابة للطلاب المتعلمين للغة الثانية كلغة اجنبية . اما من الناحية التطبيقية , فان الدراسة تامل تنير المعلمين لأهمية التحفيز والتحويل لتعلم الكتابة . تعدُّ الكتابة أكثر المهارات صعوبة وبالاخص للطلاب المتعلمين لغة ثانية كلغة اجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحفيز, التحويل, طلاب المرحلة الثانية , الأداء, متعلمي اللغة الثانية كلغة اجنبية.

1. Introduction

English is now widely used in trading, economics, science, technology, and international politics. It is impossible to understate the significance of this language in the contemporary world (Ilyosovna, 2020). As a result, most individuals are learning it through academic and non-academic venues for various of reasons. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2002), is a program of the U.S. Department of Education that provides information on state and national student achievement, states that one language skill students should be proficient in is writing. Ilyosovna (2020) argued that one of the fundamental needs for improving academic achievement, and other writing-related activities, is writing proficiency as writing is the final ability they acquire after speaking, listening, and reading. It is also a method of thinking and learning that enables the writer to transfer ideas or thoughts into the written language. According to Damanik (2017), "writing emphasis is on producing language rather than receiving it" (37). Thus, Khudhair (2020) defines academic writing (AW) as "the prestigious writing style that is used in scientific research to address a specific topic in a field".

Importance of writing is much more essential for EFL learners in University settings because students study in the English language and must require enough knowledge to write and produce specific writing genres (Bhowmik & Kim, 2021). Moreover, in the 21st century, in order to communicate ideas and information effectively in and through global networks, written communication seems vital for learners' success. Thus, communicating clearly in writing is one of the most important skills of second language learners (Halliday, 2003; Hyland, 2003). Haiwen (2012) also highlights the role of writing as an essential and integral part of English learning and an important skill for undergraduate non-English majors.

Research Problem

Developing a language is a sophisticated mental process. English is taught as a foreign language in Iraq, and it is a main subject in the curricula from elementary school to the end of secondary school. Although L2 writing is important for EFL learners who face different challenges while writing academically, it has been and continues to be a popular research issue (Khudhair, 2020). As such, scholars have begun to explore the written discourse of prescribed texts in universities or investigated the impact of specific instructional methods used in L2 writing courses to explore and identify the importance of L2 writing in various educational contexts (Wang, 2019; Yu, Zhou, & Zhang, 2022). In addition, previous research has mostly concentrated on L2 writing concerning both positive and negative feedback from instructors (Barrot, 2023; Lee, 2020)

However, the previous research, neither looked at the effect of several factors on L2 writing nor compared two groups according to multiple variables, as this study did rigorously. In the on-hand quantitative study, a causal-comparative design was used employing Simple Linear Regression analysis to fill in the gaps mentioned above and open new horizons for research in this area and Second Language Writing (SLW) field. This study's significance stems from the fact that it is the first study in the Middle East that clarifies the influence of different variables on students' writing performance and explores the relationships among L2 writing, motivation, transfer, and the gender of this unique sample, Iraqi EFL college sophomore students at the University of Mosul.

Research Question and Hypothesis

Accordingly, to fulfill the objectives of this research, the methodological part of the study relied on the following question:

- Do Motivation, transfer, and gender influence second language writing performance among Iraqi EFL College sophomore students at the College of Arts/Department of English and College of Education for Humanities/Department of English at the University of Mosul?

Based on the research question stated above, the following hypothesis was proposed:

- Motivation, transfer, and gender influence L2 writing performance among Iraqi EFL college sophomore students at the College of Arts/ Department of English and College of Education for Humanities/ Department of English at the University of Mosul

2. Review of Related literature

2.1. Motivation and L2 Writing

Motivation is defined by Denhardt et al. (2008) as "what causes people to behave as they do since it embodies looking for and attaining objectives" (p. 146). Motivation is the energy that pushes a person's actions in a certain way. The motivation of university students is a genetic phenomenon that is influenced by several factors, such as goal (action, intention, and desire), temper (the innate drive to reach a biological state), instruments (which evaluate the objective), environment (the impacts and outside stimuli).Regarding second and foreign language acquisition, motivation is one of the variables that has the most effect on individual variances in language learning (Qiao, 2024). Several scholars like Tahmouresi and Papi (2021) and Lee and Chang (2019) based their research on Dörnyei's L2 motivational self-system (2001), which examined motivation underlying writing in a second language. Additionally, evaluations must consider self-evaluation into consideration self-evaluated and those from others, for instance, parents or teachers; thus motivation is the psychological state (Alves-Wold et al., 2023).

2.1.1. Adopted Theories of Motivation

Numerous theoretical frameworks have been employed to investigate the motivation of writers, yielding a range of distinct yet interconnected motivating concepts (Camacho et al., 2022). However, the current paper is based on the two motivation theories: Implicit Theories of Writing by Dweck (1999) and Writing Achievement Goal theory by Elliot & Harackiewicz (1996) and Elliot & Church (1997).

2.1.1.1. Implicit Theories

Implicit Theories emerged in (1999) by Dweck. Those theories are crucial because they develop an ideology that shapes perspectives and comprehension of students' educational experiences, moves particular motivations, and leads to various variety of learning methods (Liu, 2021). Implicit Theories, which have two concepts: entity concepts (entity views) and growth concepts (growth views), address students' beliefs about a specific skill, such as reading, writing, or learning (De Smedt et al., 2023). Implicit theories consist of two sub-theories, Incremental Theory and Component Theory. Incremental Theorists encourage learning to conclude in mastery. They frequently rate their learning technique and degree of work effort using feedback from performance results. The component(fixed) theory's defenders believe that human intelligence is continuous and unaltered. Assessments of performance are frequent instruments utilized by component (fixed) theorists to measure their fixed level of intelligence.

Students are believed to be smart if they perform well on their schoolwork, and they lack smartness if they perform poorly. However, little research is currently available to indicate that students with incremental perceptions about writing perform more successfully when writing, supporting the relationship between implicit theories of writing and students' writing performance (Limpo& Alves, 2017; Camacho et al., 2022).

2.1.1.2. Writing Achievement Goals Theory

On the other hand, writing Achievement Goals theorists (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996) and (Elliot & Church, 1997), argue that writers could focus on particular writing objectives for different reasons. This theory has the trichotomous model of fulfillment aims, commonly utilized in research writing, mastery-oriented, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance goals. This theory assumes that there is a connection between students' writing abilities or skills and their attainment objectives (Camacho et al., 2021a). Most writing research studies concur that mastery-oriented goals and students' writing performance are positively correlated (Pajares and Cheong, 2003; Kaplan et al., 2009; Camacho et al., 2022). According to Soyulu et al. (2017), there is no whether direct or indirect relationship, between mastery objectives and writing proficiency.

In process of teaching and learning a language, research on motivation has focused more on general motivation than on any particular language abilities, such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). Studies on motivation in second language writing (SLW) have increased considerably since the late 1990s. For example, Kim and Kim (2016) observed that students' writing proficiency in language and time-based coherence can be affected by the topic that students select. Thus, when students have a chance to select the topic they want to write about, their motivation for writing will increase, and their enthusiasm will be high.

2.1.2. Related Previous Studies about L2 Writing Motivation

In recent decades, research about motivation has proliferated in fields of SLW education. For instance, Nurmi (2020) presented a study that focused on the relationship between motivation and academic writing and students' proficiency in language. The sample included 57 participants, aged range was around 17-18 years, from secondary school. They were required to fill out a Likert scale questionnaire of 45 statements about their motivation to learn and write in English as a second language. The results indicated there is a strong link between intrinsic motivation, proficiency, and L2 writing. On the other hand, Sudiyono et al. (2020), conducted a qualitative study to determine factors that make the students of the English Department at IKIP Siliwangi University become more motivated in English

language learning. Students' perceptions were investigated via structured interviews. The results revealed that teachers, learning strategies, and games were the factors that mostly affected their motivation in English language learning. Chen (2021), on the other hand, presented research to examine students' motivation with collaborative writing in L2 as a foreign language in terms of education. This study aimed to determine higher-proficiency (HP) students' motivation in L2 collaborative writing and the predicting variables that influence students' motivation. Participants were intermediate-level 20 students from China, Japan, and Saudi Arabia in an intensive English-language programme at a large research university in the United States. The results indicated that the learners had different motivation levels towards writing.

2.2. Transfer and L2 Writing

The transfer of the mother tongue or the first language (L1) is believed to affect L2 writing (Al-Saggaf et al., 2022). Researchers started concentrating on writing skills in a second language via written texts in the early 1970s. They discovered there are similarities between first and second-language writing processes (Karim & Nassajii, 2013). Furthermore, some writing strategies for first-language writing can also be applied to second-language writing, including planning, editing, and revision (Cumming, 1989). However, according to Samangan (2016), **learning** a second language demands correctness, fluency, and clarity, particularly when the native and foreign languages have distinct linguistic and structural components. These distinctions might have contributed to play a part in their mistakes and difficulties when acquiring the target language (Yusuf et al., 2021). However, EFL learners still utilize their L1 to help them learn a second language (L2), and here, they may encounter problems as the L1 characteristics compete with those of the L2 (Contemori et al., 2019).

Transfer happens in the learners' mind through a process called **interlanguage**, which is the language system that a learner of a foreign language develops based on the linguistic information that is available to him/her (Selinker, 1972). Learners of second and foreign languages utilize linguistic systems or interlanguages when acquiring a target language. Language transfer, training transfer, L2 learning techniques, L2 communication strategies, and overgeneralization of interlanguage content are the five factors listed by Selinker (1972) that directly affect the interlanguage system's output.

Being **bilingual means** that this person is fluent in more than one language. Bilingual people can be designated as sequential or simultaneous learners; sequential learners select a second language later in life, while simultaneous learners start learning two languages at birth or before age three. Using two languages in the classroom, particularly to support language learners, is another term for bilingualism. Mahzoun (2022) believes that early contact with different languages enhances an individual's comprehension of word structure. Bilingualism is the base of multilingualism, which refers to the case where a person is fluent in three languages or more (Payant, 2020). One of the primary objectives of the many works investigating bilingualism and multilingualism is to shed light on concepts like mother tongue, second language, monolingualism, bilingualism, multilingualism, etc (Azmi et al., 2020; Othman, 2020; Koptleuova et al., 2023). Payant (2020) noticed that **multilingual** writers rely on their collective language skills and reflect on various languages while developing literary ideas.

2.2.1. Related Previous Studies about Transfer and L2 Writing

Due to the complexity of the relationship between transfer and L2 writing, the relation between them was rarely explored. Research about transfer and writing started to proliferate in recent decades and many studies addressed this topic from several aspects. For instance, Wei (2020) investigated the

relationship between L1 to L2 rhetorical transfer through metacognitive awareness with 36 Chinese EFL writers as participants who were different in level of proficiency in English writing. Using an English argumentative writing assignment for data collection and based on evaluation of native English rates and a text or video as stimulated recall, the findings revealed that lower proficiency L2 writers showed fractional metacognitive awareness about L1 to L2 rhetorical transfer. This might be attributed to their perception that L2 is difficult. On the other hand, higher proficiency in L2 writing showed that they monitor and control this transfer.

On the other side, Jia et al. (2022) examined the relation between L1 and the complexity of L2 writing depending on three different writing tasks. After utilizing a sample of 60 college students in this research, the results suggested there was a negative relationship between the complexity of L2 writing lexically and syntactically and positive transfer, i.e. the higher positive transfer resulted from lexical and syntactic complexity of L2 writing. In field of education and instruction, there are fewer studies related to transfer and writing achievement. For example, Chen (2022) was concerned with the relationship between transfer and L2 writing achievement through a qualitative study using the academic scope of adaptive transfer presented by Depalma and Ringer (2011) with 6 Chinese ungraduated students. Depalma and Ringer presented several questions about adaptive transfer in writing. The findings revealed differences or negative relations between students' writing practice and the rhetoric and genre of writing.

2.3. Gender and L2 Writing

Social classification, such as gender, ethnicity, age, and social class, can be determined by the language people use. Gender is a sociocultural element in students by the learning and teaching processes, including writing (Kamari, Gorjian, & Pazhakh, 2012). According to van den Besselaar Sandstrom (2016), males want to enhance and develop their job positions and academic level more quickly than females because of the gender differences between them. In recent decades, the concept of gender and its relation to academic performance has been changed due to women's increasing contribution in all fields to establish themselves in high-level academic placement (Huang et al., 2020; Zippel, 2020). Among the many significant factors that seem to be common between academic writing and gender especially is constructing and shaping the identity and writing of L2 writers (Aslan, 2009). In recent years, this connection attracted more attention as it kept floating on the surface of the results of many studies in SLW emphasizing that L2 writing research may determine and recognize gender differences in how men and women or boys and girls write differently in L2 with taking into consideration process and produce (Kubota, 2003). Al-Saadi et al. (2020) conducted a study aimed to investigate the potential sources of gender differences in writing fluency across Arabic as a first language (L1) and English as a foreign language (FL). The participants were 77 undergraduate Omani students who produced two argumentative texts, one in Arabic and one in English, using keystroke logging to record and analyze their writing. Findings showed that females outperformed males in their writing. Another study was carried out by Kamari et al. (2012) to examine the relationship between gender and language learning regarding terms of writing. The authors used a sample of 150 BA students of the Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz, where English is taught as an FL, to compare the competence and proficiency between the two genders in writing descriptive paragraphs and their perspectives towards paragraphs. The findings indicated that males were better than females in writing because males had higher proficiency and knowledge in expressing their ideas and thoughts than females. More recent research was done by Wulandari and Trison (2020) to investigate the relation between gender and writing achievement in which male and

female students' writing skills were compared while writing a descriptive text. The sample was 26 male and 26 female students at the University of Negeri Padang English department. The results indicated there was little difference in the mean scores in favour of the female students, who scored 2,92, while the male students scored 3,09.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

The sample included Iraqi EFL sophomore students from the College of Arts/Department of English and the College of Education for Humanities/ Department of English at the University of Mosul. Those students were enrolled during the academic year of 2023- 2024. Most of them are native speakers of Arabic, and some also speak their mother tongues, such as Kurdish, Syriani, and Yazedi. The average age of the participants was 20-22 years old. The population included 480 participants: 55 students from the College of Arts and 430 from the College of Education for Humanities. Due to the difference in the size of the populations of the two colleges, stratified random sampling was the most suitable procedure used to extract the needed sample size from each college to continue the analysis (Scheaffer, Mendenhall, and Ott, 2006). Therefore, a sample of 100 students was selected from the College of Education for Humanities, and another sample of 50 students was chosen from the College of Arts to collect the final data. However, not all 150 students responded to the survey, leading to a final sample size of 116 students, with 81 respondents from the College of Education for Humanities and 35 from the College of Arts. The equation of stratified random sampling is explained below:

$$n = \frac{Np(1-p)}{[(N-1) (d/z) + p (1-p)]}$$

Where:

N= Size of population (380)

n Size of the sample (116)

d= Mistake of percentage(0.08)

z= The corresponding class of moral level (0.05), which is (1.96)

p= percentage of feature availability(0.50)

The participants gave voluntary consent once the researcher informed them of the study's goal and maintained confidentiality and privacy before publishing the data's findings.

3.2. Data Collection

A survey with prevalidated adapted scales was utilized to collect data for the on-hand study. The survey included 25 questions. 13 focused on motivation, ten on transfer, and the final 2 were about the participants' gender and their college. The two main scales of the survey, motivation and transfer, are prevalidated ones since they were adapted from other scholars' work; namely, motivation was taken from Amerian et al.'s (2020) study, while the transfer scale was adapted from the studies of two researchers; Alsaghier (2020) and Chulak (2023). The motivation scale used in this study is a five-point Likert scale,

which ranges from 1= strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree. The reason for modifying and using Amerian et al.'s (2020) motivation survey is that it encompasses the critical constructs of motivation among second language writers, which are L2 writers' intended attempts to learn the L2, reasons behind their desire to learn writing, as well as their motivational intensity in learning the language. The transfer scales of Alsaghier (2020) and Chulak (2023) were adapted in this paper because they highlight in a very precise and concise way how L1 affects L2 among second language learners in an EFL context.

The survey was formed and distributed through the online software Qualtrics, and the same software was used to gather the responses and transform them later into an SPSS data set. Although the sample included 150 learners from both colleges, only 116 viable responses were received and used in the analysis. To gather as many replies as possible, the participants were reminded twice while collecting data, which went for the first three months of the academic year of 2023-2024.

4. Data Analysis

Version 29 of the SPSS software was used to analyze the data. Simple Linear Regression was utilized to analyze the obtained data for the Research Question and its hypothesis after cleaning the data and meeting assumptions for the Regression test (Laerd Statistics, n.d.).

5. Results and Discussion

The research question focused on the multiple factors that predict performance among Iraqi sophomore students at the Colleges of Arts and Education for Humanities. The results are illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1

The Regression Model of the Motivation variable.

Coefficients					
Model	Unstandardized		Standardized	T	P-value
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Motivation	15.455	0.296	0.980	52.256	.000

Dependent Variable: Performance.

The results indicated that motivation significantly and directly affects L2 Writing performance depending on the value of the regression coefficient (B) (15.455). So, this effect is significant depending on the probability value of (t)= (.000), which is less than (0.05), where the calculated value of (t) is (52.26), which is higher than the tabled value of (t)= (1.96). The first regression equation was statistically significant where adjusted R² =.22, F calculated F_{cal}. = (4.573), F tabulated (F_{tab})=(3.943), probability (P)=.041. See Table 1 .

The significant results in the above table indicate that motivation is crucial for the L2 writing of EFL learners in Iraq as it is directly associated with those students' learning goals. Thus, motivated students learn more and perform better in writing than those with low motivation levels. Furthermore, motivated

students seek to be more active than others and more willing to be challenged by their instructors in more complicated writing tasks.

Table 2

The Regression Model of the Transfer variable

Model	Unstandardized		Standardized	T	P-value
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Transfer	21.682	0.754	0.937	28.766	.000

Dependent Variable: Performance

The same analysis, Regression, was used to explore if Transfer can predict performance. The regression equation was statistically significant (adjusted R²=.17), F calculated (Fcal.)=(4.853), F tabulated(Ftab.), and Probability (p)= (.016). The results indicated that the effect of Transfer was significant and direct on L2 writing performance, depending on the value of the regression coefficient (B) = (21.682). So, this effect is significant depending on the probability value of (t) =(0.000), which is less than (0.05); the calculated value of (t) reached (28.766), which is higher than the tabled value of (t) reached (1.96). See Table 2 .

The findings of Table 2 show that transfer from L1 to L2 significantly enhances the L2 writing outcomes of Iraqi EFL sophomore students. This might be attributed to the similar linguistic features between L1 and L2 that the learners are exploiting to write and improve their writing, which in turn indicates that the learners are aware of this positive transfer. This result also proves that the students have advanced linguistic systems of both L1 and L2 in their competence and are using the linguistic features that can help them in their L2 .

Table 3

The Regression Model of the Gender Variable.

Group Statistics							
	College	Gender	N	Mean	Std.	t-test	P-value
Performance	Arts	Male	8	75.00	15.811	1.778	0.085
		Female	27	65.93	11.688		
	Education	Male	34	67.53	8.342	0.912	0.369
		Female	47	65.87	7.862		

For the Gender variable, the results of the Regression analysis showed that the regression equation was not statistically significant since the value of the regression coefficient (B) of the gender of both colleges is greater than 0.05; that is, it was 0.085 for College of Arts and 0.369 for College of Education for Humanities. See Table 3 .

Conclusions and Implications

The current study concentrates on the factors influencing L2 writing performance among Iraqi EFL sophomore university learners. The results of the analysis indicated that among the three variables tested, motivation, transfer, and gender, only motivation and transfer were statistically significant and had a direct effect on L2 writing performance, while gender did not .

This study has important implications for students, instructors, and University administration. For students, the findings of this study shed light on the critical role of both motivation and transfer in EFL learners' L2 writing performance. On the other hand, instructors can benefit from the results of the on hand study to shape their behaviors towards unmotivated students by encouraging them to provide sufficient help when needed. Also, they can modify their writing materials, tasks, and strategies as much as possible to attain the utmost goal of the learning process for EFL learners who might face difficulties during the writing phase .

University administration can hold courses and seminars to motivate students by creating motivational environments. In addition, the University Presidency can provide writing centers to help students who struggle with writing, especially those whose background knowledge about the English language is limited or might not have insufficient vocabulary, by recruiting graduate students from Departments of English .

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