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## Identifying Linguistic and Self-Efficacy Problems of Iraqi EFL Learners in Writing Graduation Papers

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to: first investigate and identify issues in the senior EFL learners' linguistic and self-assessed ability to master different aspects of writing a graduation paper, second compare the writing performance of the learners from three departments, and third explore the association between students' self-efficacy beliefs and their writing achievement. Data were collected via Situated Academic Writing Self-Efficacy Scale (SAWSE) to see if our students are confident and to identify the most engaged writers, from departments of English in three different colleges in University of Mosul. A detailed linguistic analysis of a sample of written graduation papers by senior students was also conducted to unveil the issues in those students' academic writing. The results of the One-Way ANOVA test revealed a statistically significant difference in the writing performance among learners from the three colleges. The findings of the Spearman Correlation test indicated a small but not significant relationship between learners' self-efficacy beliefs and their writing performance, while the linguistic analysis conducted on a sample of written papers produced by the learners showed that although each cohort has certain committed linguistic mistakes, most of them were weak in text organization, syntax, and using appropriate academic vocabulary.

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تحديد المشاكل اللغوية و الكفاءة الذاتية للطلبة المتعلمين للغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية في كتابة بحوث

### التخرج

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### الخلاصة:

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى: أولاً التحقيق وتحديد المشكلات المتعلقة بقدرة خريجي قسم اللغة الانكليزية (متعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية) اللغوية والقدرة إتقان الجوانب المختلفة لكتابة بحث التخرج، وثانياً

مقارنة الأداء الكتابي للطلبة من ثلاثة أقسام للغة الانكليزية وثالثاً استكشاف العلاقة بين معتقدات الكفاءة الذاتية لدى الطلاب وتحصيلهم الكتابي. تم جمع البيانات عبر مقياس الكفاءة الذاتية للكتابة الأكاديمية (SAWSE) الذي طوره Mitchell et al. (2021) لمعرفة ما إذا كان الطلبة واثقين من أنفسهم ولتحديد الكتاب الأكثر تفاعلاً من أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية في ثلاث كليات مختلفة في جامعة الموصل. كما تم إجراء تحليل لغوي مفصل لعينة من بحوث التخرج المكتوبة من قبل الطلبة الخريجين لكشف النقاب عن المشكلات في الكتابة الأكاديمية لهؤلاء الطلبة. كشفت نتائج اختبار One-Way ANOVA عن وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في الأداء الكتابي بين الدارسين من الكليات الثلاث ، كما أشارت نتائج اختبار سبيرمان إلى وجود علاقة صغيرة و لكنها ليست ذات دلالة إحصائية بين معتقدات الكفاءة الذاتية لدى المتعلمين وأدائهم الكتابي، في حين أظهر التحليل اللغوي الذي أجري على عينة من مشاريع البحوث التي أنتجها الطلبة أنه على الرغم من أن كل قسم لديه أخطاء لغوية معينة، كان معظمهم ضعفاء في تنظيم الفقرات و النص، وتركيب الجملة، واستخدام المفردات الأكاديمية المناسبة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكفاءة الذاتية، الكتابة، متعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية، المشكلات اللغوية، بحوث التخرج.

## Introduction

Writing a graduation paper or project is required from senior students in all Iraqi universities and it is a separate subject that has its own units and grade. As such, each student is, or sometimes two students who share one research paper are, given to a supervisor (a college instructor) to start and complete a research project within an academic year that begins from September and ends in June from the next calendar year. Students are expected to write academically a nice, organized article that discusses a real pedagogical issue. “Academic writing (AW) refers to the prestigious writing style that is used in scientific research to address a specific topic in a field” (Khudhair, 2020, 12). Unfortunately, the characteristics of AW that are unknown for our Iraqi EFL learners create more complications during writing the projects leading to low self-efficacy among students who become demotivated and commit more linguistic and methodological mistakes in their papers. Self-efficacy is related to one’s beliefs in his/her ability to produce desired effects by their actions (Bandura, 1997). It is a motivational construct which functions to improve human’s impulse. In a learning context, this impulse provides learners with the power to promote their learning result or performance. Struggling

with writing skills and identified low self-efficacy in writing have been attached to impeded learner progression among various academic disciplines (Mitchell & McMillan, 2018).

Although writing self-efficacy in relation to academic performance of students in ESL environment have received much attention in most of prior studies, scarce research has quantitatively explored Iraqi EFL senior learners' linguistic and motivational challenges while writing their graduation paper. Hence this study intends to examine this understudied area using the Situated Academic Writing Self-Efficacy Scale that was developed by Mitchell, McMillan, Lobchuk, Nickel, Rabbani, & Li (2021). This scale evaluates the proficiency level of university learners in academic writing of various genres, such as assignments, essays, projects, seminars, and theses and dissertations in addition to other contextual variables.

The importance of this study also lies in revealing the relationship between highly developed writing skills of our learners and their self-efficacy beliefs that work as main factors in affecting those students' writing performance represented by the graduating papers in Departments of English at University of Mosul/Iraq. Our Iraqi students are not exempted from writing problems that are recognized in the higher education sector, which include, but not limited to, choosing a topic, the misuse of vocabularies and punctuation, spelling and grammatical mistakes, and referencing (Magogwe, Ramoroka, & Mogana-Monyepi, 2015). University of Mosul's instructors raised concerns many times about students' poor writing skills, and they tried to find ways to assist students to address their writing problems as well as to improve their academic writing via the Academic Writing and the Writing Essay courses which are offered in the second and third levels during their study in the Department of English.

Therefore, to achieve the aims of this study, the following questions will guide the methodological part of this study:

1. Do differences exist in the writing performance among senior Iraqi EFL learners from English departments of College of Arts, College of Education, and College of Basic Education?
2. Is there a statistically significant correlation between Iraqi EFL learners' writing performance and their self-efficacy for writing?

3. Are Iraqi EFL senior learners able to professionally write a graduation paper in English in terms of discourse, syntax, vocabulary, organization, and writing mechanics?

The following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: No differences exist in the writing performance among senior Iraqi EFL learners from English departments College of Arts, College of Education, and College of Basic Education?

Hypothesis 2: There is a relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' writing performance and their self-efficacy for writing?

Hypothesis 3: Iraqi EFL senior learners are unable to professionally write a graduation paper in English in terms of discourse, syntax, vocabulary, organization, and writing mechanics.

## **2. Review Literature**

### **2.1. Academic Self-Efficacy**

The term self- efficacy or “perceived self-efficacy” is penitent to Bandura’s (1977) psychological framework of behavior, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). SCT illustrates that people behave and learn in a particular way due to physical and social and environmental variables, such as occupational and institutional systems, career changes, food types, illnesses, migration, biological modifications, colleagues, family, friends, temperature, status, and age (Bandura 1997; Glanz, Rimer, and Lewis, 2002). Self-efficacy denotes a person’s specific beliefs about his/her abilities to do a task, like reading a book or writing an article. Bandura (2006) indicates that “the efficacy belief system is not a global trait, but a differentiated set of self-beliefs linked to distinct realms of functioning. Multidomain measures reveal the patterning and degree of generality of people’s sense of personal efficacy” (307). Walker (2003) maintains that performing any task relies on the objectives which are set by the learners themselves within a specific situation. Students’ self-efficacy is also influenced by the value, interest, emotional reactions, and utility. Prior studies have investigated the relation between this important concept, self-efficacy belief, and other motivation constructs, such as task value, self-regulation, self-esteem, self-concept, and anxiety (Lane, Lane & Kyprianou. 2004; Pajares and Cheong 2003; Garcia and de Caso 2006). According to Bandura (1994, 1997) the higher the self-

efficacy believes, the higher the levels of intrinsic motivation will be which entails that those people can do more challenging and difficult tasks than their peers and they are likely to be less anxious. However, people who have low self-efficacy also have low levels of intrinsic motivation and thus are easily discouraged and drop tasks (Al Azzawi & Taha, 2023).

Driven by the results of prior work, other scholars investigated the underlying beliefs that motivate students to write. This steered researchers to propose that learners' beliefs about their writing proficiency are ultimately vital to their success as writers (Pajares, 2007). Consequently, much research in recent years focused more on exploring the connection between learners' writing self-efficacy, other writing motivation factors, and different writing outcomes.

More recently, some findings have addressed how to improve learners' confidence and self-efficacy to produce better writing. Magogwe et al. (2015) maintains that writing self-efficacy emerges from several sources, such as mastering a performance of a previous experience, competition experience where a person compares his/her performance against that of others to see if s/he did better, positive feedback from others like instructors, parents or peers, and psychological and emotional factors like anxiety (Bandura 1997; Schunk 2003; DeWitz, Woolsey, and Walsh, 2009). Self-efficacy beliefs were found to play a crucial role in writing in the higher education of many countries. Filippou (2019) conducted a study to assess EFL learners' self-efficacy during their study to get a master's degree in various fields in Finland. The author analyzed students' self-efficacy while performing various academic assignments to obtain a better understanding of their perspectives on their capability to complete their degree. The results have revealed that there were differences in the graduate learners' self-efficacy due to the fields of study and nationalities. McBride, Murray, & Duggan (2021), on the other hand investigated self-efficacy's role in reinforcing psychosocial and academic adjustments during the first year at college while taking an academic first-year course. Using the Psychological Well-Being (PWB) and Academic Self-Efficacy (ASE) surveys, the results have shown that ASE has increased during the semester, empowered by increasing confidence in paper writing and classroom participation. However, time/study management's self-efficacy did not mostly change. Also, it has been found that ASE predicted students' academic performance and their PWB. Liu, Cheng, & Chen (2022) discussed academic self-efficacy of students in their review chapter

differently where they focused on cross-culture and culture experience that can affect or be affected by learners' academic self-efficacy. According to the authors, because international learners move to another culture, where they pursue their study, that has different cultural values than that of theirs, a clash may happen that influences those learners' self-efficacy, which may in turn impact their academic learning process.

To sum up, prior works have indicated that academic self-efficacy has significant influence on students' learning performance and motivation. There are many research orientations of academic self-efficacy, writing performance and the anxiety it produces influence EFL learners' self-efficacy and eventually their motivation to write. Therefore, this study sheds some light on the issues our Iraqi EFL learners face while they are writing their research paper before graduation.

## **2.2. EFL Learners Academic Self-efficacy**

A bachelor's graduation paper must be an original and individual piece of work that is written by final-year college students, who must write it using a sophisticated academic language. The students must present their graduation paper orally for examination. Through writing this project, students should prove they have attained certain competencies pertinent to their intellectual and academic development (Llaurado-Serra, Rodríguez, Gallart, Fuster, Monforte-Royo, & De Juan, 2018). Writing a complete paper and defending it in a public exam are two of the most challenging and complex tasks university learners must accomplish during their bachelor study (Fidalgo, Collado, & Senís, 2019). Unfortunately, most students lack academic writing skills and proper oral communication about their paper during the defense (Becerra-Traver, 2017; Lloyd, 2007). This, eventually, creates negative emotions and anxiety among them and makes feel that their efficacy is low and insufficient to complete the project (Fidalgo et al., 2019). Therefore, self-efficacy is a very crucial concept for learning, and abundant research shows a certain connection between academic achievement and self-efficacy (Doménech-Betoret, Abellán-Roselló, & Gómez-Artiga, 2017).

Iraqi EFL learners are not native speakers, rather they are learning English as a foreign language which means that they are learning it in an environment where English is not spoken or written natively which entails many expected linguistic and pragmatic difficulties (Al-Abbasi & Al-Azzawi, 2008). From the four skills of this new language,

writing is the hardest one that needs to be mastered (Ferris, 2009). As mentioned before writing and self-efficacy are interrelated as the more learners are confident (self-sufficed), the better writing piece they will produce. Following this sense, researchers were attracted to examine this relation to see how it affects learners' achievement. Magogwe et al. (2015) used interviews, an evaluated written task, and questionnaires to discover the relation between undergraduate students' writing skill and their self-efficacy values in an advanced writing skill subject. The results revealed that even though learners' self-assessing was somehow high, their self- efficacy opinions were modest. Also, it has been found that there were no relationships between learners' writing performance, represented by essay, and their efficacy beliefs. Zumbrunn, Broda, Varier, & Conklin (2020), on the other hand, explored learners' writing self-efficacy with its multiple facets and its relationship with students' writing outcomes who are from various age groups in elementary and high schools in USA. Data was collected from 518 high school and 992 elementary students in addition to 65 teachers from 6 schools using electronic survey questionnaires, one to assess students' writing self-efficacy and the other for their teachers' reports about students' self-regulation in writing and their grades. The results demonstrated that self-efficacy for writing rules was significantly connected to ELA grades/ writing of elementary students and of high school students. Writing conventions variable was the only element that is significantly related to report of teachers about students' writing self-regulation for high school and elementary students.

Another strand of research focused on the writing instruction in terms of improving self-efficacy of future teachers and preparing them to teach writing properly. For instance, Hodges, Wright, & McTigue (2021) conducted a study in which they proposed a survey questionnaire, "Preservice Teacher Self-Efficacy for Writing Inventory (PTSWI)", to measure the self-efficacy of pre-service teachers for academic writing and writing instruction. The results of the reliability and validity tests on this survey revealed that the reliable and valid scores are supported by current theories from psychology and academic writing research. In same line, Collado, Fidalgo, Rodríguez-Rey, & Sorrel (2022) study focused on validating a scale to assess senior students' attitudes about their efficacy toward writing and defending a written text like a thesis or a dissertation using 418 learners from twenty-three Spanish universities. It has been found that the scale is stable across sex with correlations between anxiety and self-efficacy measures.

### 2.3. Instructor Feedback and Students' Self Efficacy

Extensive research has shown that appropriate feedback can help Second Language (L2) learners to develop strategic competency to improve the monitoring process of their writing as well as enhance the final version of their written work (Gan, He, Zhang, & Schumacker, 2023; Hyland and Hyland, 2019; Lee, Luo, & Mak, 2021). Since feedback is an important tool used to promote learning success of students, it is expected that the instructor's feedback will lead students to adopt self-regulatory techniques that leads them to be confident and motivated to develop their writing (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In Second Language Writing (SLW), self-regulated writers are learners who are able to regulate and monitor their writing behavior against the aims set for improving a written text via revisions (Teng, Wang, and Zhang, 2022). Thus, to encourage developing L2 writers, feedback must focus on improving learners' self-efficacy behaviors (Sadler, 1989).

However, research findings were inconsistent about the impact of feedback on learners' writing self-efficacy as some claim it decreases their writing self-efficacy, while others suggested that it has positive influence on students' self-efficacy. Ruegg (2018) used experimental design to compare the change in the self-efficacy during one year between two university Japanese students where the first group received instructor's feedback on each initial draft whereas the students in the other group took feedback from their peers on their draft through the same time. The results indicated that the first group, who got feedback from the instructor, had a significant increase in their writing self-efficacy more than the second group, who obtained feedback from peers. Lee & Evans' (2019) mixed-method study, on the other hand, investigated the influence of colleagues' feedback on second language writers' self-efficacy and the effective procedures motivating the hypothesized self-efficacy sources involved in a peer feedback activity of 110 EFL Chinese university students. The sample was divided and assigned into two groups, experimental and control, where the experimental groups received peer feedback via electronic and face-to-face discussions. Data were collected through a questionnaire and interviews on the foundations of self-efficacy and the effectiveness of given feedback. The results have shown that the first group, treatment groups, had positive transformation in their writing self-efficacy due to giving, but not obtaining peer feedback. Writing self-efficacy beliefs were also formed via an active interaction between productive and receptive experiences, goal achievement directions, computer- based discussions, and

community comparisons. Similar results were found by the qualitative study of Yang, Zhang, & Dixon (2023) who delved into how the levels of self-regulation and received feedback during the writing process affected improving self-regulated writing techniques of EFL college Chinese learners in a writing class. The results revealed that there was an increase in learners' aim planning as well as the monitoring process for writing assignments due to the self-regulatory directed and process feedback from instructors.

Although the results of the above studies confirm that feedback is beneficial for learners' writing, students sometimes disagree with these findings. For instance, in their qualitative study Putri & Munir (2021) investigated the attitudes of 10 Egyptian EFL learners toward instructors' feedback in an English course and the effect of this feedback on those students' self-efficacy. Using thematic analysis for the interview collected data, the authors found out that the senior high school EFL learners perceived teachers' feedback both positively and negatively. In other words, even though the feedback was useful in developing students' learning self-efficacy in terms of setting aims, increasing monitoring and requesting help, and adopting self-evaluating strategies in English language learning, some feedbacks were very negative that students did not want to write, or their writing product was really bad due to the feedback anxiety they felt. Negative feedback can indeed impact students' attitudes and performance and this might be attributed to the teachers' unpreparedness to teach writing. Such serious issue, therefore, requires a drastic change in teachers' preparation programs which should aim specifically to develop preservice teachers of writing instruction since concentrating on students' self-efficacy, increasing future teachers' preparedness and confidence to teach writing could produce positive effect on the practices related to writing instruction (Hodges et al., 2021).

### 3. Methodology

In the following sections, the sample participants, data collection, results, and discussion will be described.

#### 3.1. Sample

The sample of this study included 240, male and female, EFL senior students at English Departments from three colleges: College of Arts (72 learners), College of Education (85 learners), and College of Basic Education (83 learners) in

University of Mosul. The average age of the participants was 22-24 years old, and all students were assigned to an instructor to complete a research project paper during the academic year 2022-2023. After completing the paper, the learner/learners, if two learners share one graduation paper, was/were examined by an examining committee composed of three qualified instructors in the same area of the project who hold various titles. Our Iraqi learners can choose either linguistics or literature as a sub-field of English language and select a topic to write their papers about accordingly. Since this study used convenience sampling, EFL learners from both subfields were employed and the examined written sample by the researcher included a mixture from both linguistics and literature papers. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to the participants at the beginning of the second course, assuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the students in reporting the results of the data, and the students participated voluntarily.

### 3.2. Data Collection

Data were collected during the academic year of 2022-2023 using two methods: the Situated Academic Writing Self-Efficacy Scale (SAWSES), students' final scores on their papers, obtained from the involved departments, and a sample of written graduation papers from each department. The pre-validated SAWSES survey, developed by Mitchell et al. 2021, was adapted and used to collect the first part of the data related to learners' self-efficacy in writing. It is a 5-point likert scale where 1 = strongly agree, 2 = somewhat agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = somewhat disagree, and 5 = strongly disagree. The reason of using this survey specifically is because it was developed based on Bandura's Self-Efficacy (SE) Theory and a structured writing model that focuses on important writing skills of learners' academic writing self-efficacy in relation to other contextual variables. The scale has three subscales: Creative Identity, Relational Reflective, and Writing Essentials. The survey has 16 items that are distributed as 5, 8 and 3 respectively on the aforementioned subscales. The second method of data collection focused on learners' academic writing performance represented by the final grade they were given by the examining committee at the end of the project in addition to examining the linguistic elements, such as cohesiveness, grammatical and spelling issues, in a sample of their graduation papers.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS software, version 26. Both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were employed to analyze the obtained data.

### 3.4. Results and Discussion

A One-Way ANOVA test was conducted on data obtained for Research Question One which addressed the difference in the writing performance among senior Iraqi EFL learners from English departments of College of Arts, College of Education, and College of Basic Education. Table 1 explains the descriptives of the sample (240 learners) and their distribution according to colleges.

**Table 1:** Descriptives of Iraqi Senior EFL Learners according to College and Writing Scores.

College	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Arts	63.3889	11.67103	72
Basic Education	78.6747	9.86631	83
Education	82.6588	10.54983	85
Total	75.5000	13.37518	240

Based on the Means of the writing scores of the learners, students in College of Education got the highest grades (82.6) for their final paper followed by students from Colleges of Basic Education (78.6), and Arts (63.3) respectively.

**Table 2:** Levene's Homogeneity Test.

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Writing Based on Mean	.960	2	237	.384

scores	Based on Median	.605	2	237	.547
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.605	2	223.74 7	.547
	Based on trimmed mean	.923	2	237	.399

Before running the ANOVA test, the Homogeneity of Variances Test was administrated to make sure that there were not major differences among all the learners of the sample. Table 2 illustrates that the test was met perfectly due to its non-significance ( $p \leq .384$ ).

Table 3 shows the results of the One-Way ANOVA test, which revealed a statistically significant difference among the EFL learners of the three groups in the writing scores,  $F(2,237) = 69.13$ ,  $P = .000$  ( $P < .05$ ).

**Table 3:** Writing Performance Difference among Senior Iraqi EFL Learners across the Colleges.

ANOVA					
Writing Scores					
	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	15753.566	2	7876.783	69.134	.000
Within Groups	27002.434	237	113.934		
Total	42756.000	239			

Since the One-Way ANOVA test does not report exactly where the difference is among the three groups, the Dunnett post hoc test was run as seen below in Table 4. The results of the post hoc test indicate that there was a statistically significant difference between the writing mean scores of students at Colleges of Arts (1) and Education (3) ( $P = .000$  ( $P < .05$ )).

However, there was no statistically significant difference between the writing mean scores of students at Colleges of Education (3) and Basic Education (2) ( $P = .031$  ( $P > .05$ )).

**Table 4:** The Dunnett Post Hoc Test Based on the Writing Scores.

		95% Confidence Interval				
College	College	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1.00	3.00	-19.26993*	1.70963	.000	-23.0790	-15.4608
2.00	3.00	-3.98412*	1.64715	.031	-7.6540	-.3142

\*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

a. Dunnett t-tests treat one group as a control and compare all other groups against it.

Due to the above results, the first hypothesis is rejected since a statistically significant difference was found in the means of writing scores (their performance) based on the colleges they attend.

Research Question Two focused on the relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' self-efficacy for writing and their writing performance. The hypothesis related to this RQ indicates a positive relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' writing and their self-efficacy for writing. The data obtained for this question were analyzed using Spearman Correlation Test. This test was used because the data is not normally distributed, and the variables are ordinal and scale. The results of the Spearman Correlation Test revealed significant negative correlation between the writing product of EFL learners and their self-efficacy beliefs  $r_s(238) = 111, P = .116$  ( $P > .05$ ). See Table 5 below.

**Table 5:** The Correlation between Self-Efficacy and Students' Writing.

		<b>Correlations</b>	
		Writing scores	Self- efficacy
Writing scores	Pearson Correlation	1	.111
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.116
	N	240	204
Self- Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.111	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.116	
	N	204	204

As such, the second hypothesis was rejected due to the negative relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' writing and their self-efficacy beliefs.

For Research Question Three, a sample of four written graduation papers in English for both literature and linguistics students were selected from each college and the papers were analyzed professionally by the researcher based on an analytical rubric to see if the learners can write efficiently a graduation paper in English in terms of cohesiveness and writing mechanics. The rubrics was used to evaluate the papers in terms of sentence structure, discourse, coherence, organization, vocabulary, and conventions. The features examined in the rubrics were chosen by relying on emergent patterns of problems and challenges students committed in their written piece of work and based on Mahmood & Khudhair's study (2022) which investigated he misuse/ overuse of discourse markers by Iraqi EFL university students. Discourse assesses learners' ability to tackle the purpose of a task and addresses; organization is associated with cohesion and coherence; syntax evaluates learners' mastery of sentences structures; vocabulary concentrates on the proficiency of using academic words correctly, and conventions focus on learners' grammatical

skills, such as using punctuation, capitalization, and parts of speech appropriately.

The results revealed that Cohort One (College of Arts students) showed good skills in the discourse aspect as they were able to address the purpose of the topic. However, they faced difficulties in using vocabularies correctly which might be attributed to the fact that they are EFL learners and English is not their first language. Also, it was noticed that those learners have challenges in syntax and organization of their academic texts, especially in the punctuation, and cohesion among paragraphs, and combining sentences to build a text. Cohort Two (College of Basic Education students) exhibited higher writing skills in terms of organization, syntax, and vocabulary use but lower performance in writing conventions and discourse, particularly using parts of speech and punctuation. Cohort Three (College of Education students), on the other hand, showed highly advanced writing skills than their counterparts in the other two colleges, especially in terms of organization and vocabulary use. However, they also have some weaknesses in using writing conventions and grammar as they had weak style due to the misuse of transition signals to connect paragraphs appropriately. These results are supported by the performance scores of the learners presented in Table 1 where the means of Colleges of Arts, Basic Education, and Education were 63.3, 78.6, and 82.6 respectively. The findings of the third research question confirm the third hypothesis which entails that Iraqi EFL senior learners are unable to professionally write a graduation paper in English in terms of discourse, syntax, vocabulary, organization, and writing mechanics, and thus it was accepted.

### **Implications and Future Studies**

The most important implication of this study's findings is related to university instructors who should encourage students and help them improve their self-confidence in academic writing since this will increase their motivation towards writing and eventually their final achievement in the oral test of the graduation paper. The results of this study are also important for our senior student in low self-efficacy cohorts as they can strengthen their identified drawbacks in future work settings.

Although the current study has addressed several important issues that Iraqi EFL students face while writing and their graduation thesis or project, other future studies can be conducted in the same line including students' self-efficacy and graduation paper defense, the impact of e-learning on graduation paper writing (Khudhair, 2022), and the relationship between motivation and students' level of education.

## **Conclusion**

Based on Bandura's SE theory, the present study explored and identified challenges in the senior EFL learners' linguistic and self-assessed ability to master different aspects of writing a graduation paper, compared the writing performance of the learners from the three English departments at three different Colleges in University of Mosul, and investigated the association between learners' writing performance and their self-efficacy for writing. From the obtained data, it can be concluded that for learners to write a fine academic work, they should have a strong foundation in terms of syntactic and grammatical features of sophisticated texts. Such findings have significant implications for the Teaching Preparation curriculum in our Iraqi universities as it requests an assessment of the pedagogical standards and content of the writing courses that are supposed to address improving students' skills needed to complete an academic written piece like a graduation paper.

The findings also demonstrate that writing performance among the learners differed significantly across colleges which might be attributed to the supervising variances among the supervisors who hold different titles and qualifications. Individual differences and background knowledge in research methods among students also play an important role in the score discrepancy across the colleges. Therefore, this study, enhances our awareness of the role of supervisor's feedback in promoting students' self-esteem and consequently their written product.

Although there was small positive relationship between learners' self-efficacy beliefs and their written paper, it was not significant, and which could be explained by the fact that the learners are EFL students are not motivated enough to improve their writing. While this finding maintains that self-efficacy should not be

essentially high for learners to be encouraged to perform more efficiently, supporting those beliefs may add to learners' methods to develop their writing performance. This is particularly vital in our study context since the learners are prospect English teachers who are responsible for breaking series of poor and unequal academic literacy proficiency.

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