



Perceived Writing Self-Efficacy Across Gender and Study Level among EFL Undergraduates: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

While extensive research has underscored the role of self-efficacy in academic performance, far less attention has been given to how writing self-efficacy develops and varies across educational stages and gender. Recognizing this gap, the present study employs a correlational cross-sectional design to examine Moroccan university students' writing self-efficacy beliefs and to explore potential differences across study levels and gender. Data collection included 177 students from semester 2 and semester 6, who completed a writing self-efficacy scale assessing four dimensions: linguistic, self-regulatory, genre-based, and class performance, followed by semi-structured interviews with 14 students. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were processed thematically. Results indicated that students reported the highest self-efficacy in linguistic skills, followed by self-regulatory and genre-based skills, with the lowest in class performance self-efficacy. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in overall self-efficacy across study levels, with higher-level students demonstrating greater confidence. However, no significant difference was observed between male and female students. The qualitative findings suggested that writing self-efficacy is shaped by students' writing experiences, academic progression, feedback, social interactions, and emotional responses. These findings highlight the importance of integrating linguistic, self-regulatory, and genre-specific instruction with constructive feedback and opportunities for successful writing experiences to strengthen Moroccan EFL students' writing self-efficacy.

1. Introduction

Writing proficiency is central to academic success in higher education, where students are expected to produce increasingly complex texts that require linguistic accuracy, effective organization, and the ability to develop and critically evaluate ideas (Ismajli & Kareva, 2024; Wang et al., 2025). Because writing is a “recursive, strategic, and multi-dimensional” activity (Harris et al., 2011, p. 188), successful academic writing depends not only on linguistic and cognitive resources but also on psychological factors. Among these, writing self-efficacy, learners' beliefs about their capability to successfully perform writing tasks, has received considerable attention in educational psychology and applied linguistics (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2003). Research has generally associated stronger writing self-efficacy with greater persistence, more effective strategy use, and better writing performance (Bruning et al., 2013). EFL research has similarly indicated that self-efficacy can influence learners' engagement with revision and their ability to develop coherent arguments (Han & Hiver, 2018).

The role of writing self-efficacy may be particularly important in foreign-language contexts, where students must manage the cognitive demands of composing while also dealing with limitations in vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and other aspects of the target language (Abouabdelkader & Bouziane, 2016). These challenges are particularly relevant in Morocco, where English is learned within a multilingual educational environment and, for many university students, follows Moroccan Arabic and French. Academic writing in English therefore requires students to coordinate linguistic resources with increasingly demanding academic practices, including argumentation, analysis, organization, and critical evaluation.

Research conducted in Morocco has documented substantial difficulties in students' English writing. Abouabdelkader and Bouziane (2016) highlighted the linguistic and cognitive demands of EFL writing and challenges in writing instruction, while Aknouch and Bouthiche (2022) reported difficulties in grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and syntax. Amrous and Nejmaoui (2016) additionally identified challenges in applying critical thinking to written production. More recently, Bakir et al. (2026) reported difficulties involving cohesion, punctuation, and organization and other aspects. Although these studies demonstrate the range of linguistic and cognitive demands Moroccan EFL learners encounter, they provide limited insight into how students perceive their own capabilities as writers. This distinction is important because writing difficulties and writing self-efficacy represent related but distinct dimensions of the writing experience.

Despite growing international interest in writing self-efficacy, limited research has examined Moroccan university students' beliefs about their ability to write effectively in English, particularly in academic contexts. Existing Moroccan research has predominantly addressed writing difficulties and proficiency, leaving students' efficacy beliefs comparatively underexplored. Given the central role and cognitive demands of academic writing in higher education, examining these beliefs can provide valuable insight into students' academic writing experiences. Accordingly, the present study examines Moroccan university students' writing self-efficacy and explores whether it varies according to study level and gender. To this end, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the overall level of perceived writing self-efficacy among Moroccan EFL students?

RQ2: To what extent does writing self-efficacy differ by gender?

RQ3: To what extent does perceived writing self-efficacy differ across study levels?

RQ4: What sources influence students' writing self-efficacy beliefs?

2. Theoretical Framework

Bandura's Socio-Cognitive Theory

A central tenet of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is the concept of self-efficacy, defined as individuals' beliefs about their capability to perform a particular behavior or accomplish a specific task (Bandura, 2006; Saito, 2020). These beliefs influence how individuals approach tasks, including the goals they set, the effort they invest, their persistence in the face of difficulties, and their responses to setbacks. From a metacognitive perspective, Escorcia (2024) conceptualizes self-efficacy as a form of metacognitive knowledge that constitutes part of individuals' self-representations. Thus, self-efficacy concerns not only what learners know or can do, but also what they believe they are capable of accomplishing.

Within writing contexts, writing self-efficacy refers to learners' beliefs about their ability to successfully perform writing-related tasks and regulate the processes involved in written production. Pajares et al. (2007) argue that writing self-efficacy involves writers' representations of their perceived mastery of both linguistic and procedural aspects of writing. Similarly, Bruning et al. (2013) conceptualize writing self-efficacy as confidence in three broad areas: ideation, writing conventions, and self-regulation. Such beliefs can influence how

writers approach writing tasks and how effectively they regulate their writing processes (Teng & Wang, 2023).

More recent conceptualizations have emphasized the task- and genre-specific nature of writing self-efficacy. Zhang et al. (2023), for example, conceptualize writing self-efficacy as a multidimensional construct comprising confidence in linguistic abilities, self-regulation, class-based writing performance, and genre-based writing performance. The linguistic dimension concerns confidence in aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and revision. The self-regulatory dimension reflects learners' confidence in their ability to plan, monitor, and regulate their writing processes. The class-based performance dimension concerns students' confidence in successfully completing writing tasks in their current instructional context (Mendoza et al., 2022), whereas the genre-based performance dimension refers to confidence in performing writing tasks across particular genres (Zhang et al., 2023). This multidimensional perspective is particularly relevant to the present study because it recognizes that students may not hold a uniform sense of confidence across different aspects of writing.

According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy develops through four main sources of efficacy information: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Mastery experiences, or interpretations of previous successes and failures, are generally the most influential; perceived success strengthens self-efficacy, whereas failure may weaken it (Bandura, 1986, 1997). In writing contexts, students' perceptions of their previous performance are particularly important in shaping their writing self-efficacy (Pajares et al., 2007). Vicarious experiences arise from observing others, particularly comparable peers; observing similar others succeed can strengthen efficacy beliefs, whereas failure may undermine them (Bandura, 1997, 2023). Verbal persuasion, including encouragement and feedback, can strengthen confidence and persistence, while negative feedback may weaken efficacy beliefs. Finally, physiological and affective states, such as anxiety, stress, and tension, can influence learners' judgments of their writing capabilities, with effective emotional regulation supporting stronger self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Usher & Pajares, 2006b; Usher et al., 2023). Together, these sources explain how writing self-efficacy develops through students' experiences, observations, social feedback, and emotional responses to writing.

Overall, examining writing self-efficacy provides important insights into how learners perceive their capabilities when engaging in academic writing tasks (Traga Philippakos & Davis, 2025). In the context of the present study, writing self-efficacy is therefore understood as a multidimensional and task-sensitive set of beliefs concerning students' perceived capabilities in linguistic performance, self-regulation, and writing performance across instructional and genre-specific contexts. This conceptualization provides the theoretical basis for examining students' writing self-efficacy and for investigating how these beliefs may vary across genders and study levels.

3. Literature Review

Self-Efficacy and Writing Performance

A substantial body of research has established a positive association between self-efficacy and EFL writing performance. Chen and Zhang (2019), Zabihi (2018), and Zhang and Guo (2012) reported positive effects on writing development, while Sun et al. (2021) found a moderate relationship between writing self-efficacy and achievement. Teng (2022) further showed that self-efficacy accounted for 14.7% of the variance in writing scores, while Teng and Teng (2024) and Wardana et al. (2025) highlighted its predictive role, particularly in relation to feedback and corrective input. However, the strength of this relationship varies across contexts and tasks, as illustrated by the weaker effects reported by Chen and Zhang (2019) and the nonsignificant performance effect found by Yao et al. (2023).

Research has also highlighted the multidimensional nature of writing self-efficacy. Teng and Wang (2022) identified linguistic, self-regulatory, and performance dimensions, which were also linked to writing performance and strategy use by Golparvar and Khafi (2021). Xu

and Wang (2024) found that these dimensions differentially influenced feedback-seeking, while Zumbrunn et al. (2019) and Tsao (2021) linked dimensions such as ideation, conventions, and self-regulation to writing engagement and achievement. Moreover, self-efficacy interacts with other psychological and cognitive factors: Payaprom and Payaprom (2025) and Cai and Zhao (2023) linked it with metacognitive strategy use, Shen and Tao (2025) and Tabari et al. (2025) with anxiety and linguistic outcomes, Prihandoko et al. (2024) with growth mindset and metacognition, and Meng and Zhang (2023) with academic engagement.

In Morocco, evidence remains limited but is emerging. Bouzar and El Idrissi (2025), using a much larger sample of 729 Moroccan EFL university students, found gender-specific relationships among writing self-efficacy, anxiety, motivation, and performance. Self-efficacy was negatively associated with performance among females but positively associated among males. Overall, these findings confirm the relevance of self-efficacy to writing while suggesting that its role varies across tasks, dimensions, and learner characteristics. However, Moroccan research remains limited, particularly regarding how writing self-efficacy varies across educational levels and gender.

Writing Self-Efficacy and Study Level

Beyond its relationship with performance, self-efficacy may develop as students progress through higher education. Luo et al. (2023), examining 1,158 Chinese college students across different years of study, found that both self-efficacy and learning engagement increased with seniority and were positively related to academic achievement. Similar positive relationships between self-efficacy and academic achievement have been reported by Moussa (2023) among 374 higher education students in the Emirates, Nasir and Iqbal (2019) among 135 pre-service teachers, Akram and Ghazanfar (2014) among Pakistani Master's students, and Weda et al. (2018). Truong and Wang (2019) likewise found a positive association between self-efficacy and English performance. In addition, Aziz and Quraishi (2017) observed stronger foreign-language learning inclinations among science students than arts students, while Sayeh et al. (2024) suggested that proficiency and self-efficacy may vary according to both developmental stage and academic discipline.

Evidence from Morocco, however, is less consistent. Zaid (2020) found no significant differences in self-efficacy by gender or between students in semesters three and five. In contrast, Omari et al. (2020), in a study of 365 undergraduates, reported moderate overall self-efficacy and significant differences by educational level and institutional type, with third-year and private-university students reporting higher levels; gender differences were not significant. Bouih et al. (2021), meanwhile, found a small but significant positive relationship between general self-efficacy and academic achievement among 138 Moroccan EFL university students and reported significantly higher self-efficacy among female students. Importantly, their study also called for research examining more domain-specific forms of self-efficacy, such as EFL writing.

The studies reviewed so far suggest that self-efficacy may develop with educational progression, but the available Moroccan evidence points to no clear pattern. Moreover, much of the existing research has examined general or academic self-efficacy rather than writing-specific beliefs. This makes study level an important variable for investigating whether students' confidence in their writing capabilities changes across stages of undergraduate education.

Writing Self-Efficacy and Gender

In addition to study level, gender has also received considerable attention in research on writing self-efficacy. Writing has traditionally been associated with femininity (Sun & Wang, 2020; Pajares, 2002), and early research frequently reported higher writing self-efficacy among females (Pajares & Valiante, 2001). More recent evidence, however, remains mixed. Traga Philippakos and Davis (2025), examining persuasive and narrative writing, found that female

students reported higher self-efficacy and more positive affect toward writing. Anastasiou and Michail (2013) similarly reported higher writing self-efficacy among females, while Anam and Susanto (2017) found that Indonesian female students showed greater confidence and stronger self-regulatory abilities in English writing. Conversely, Al-Kfaween (2010) found no gender differences despite variation by specialization, and Williams and Takaku (2011) likewise found no gender differences in writing self-efficacy even though girls outperformed boys. Grenner et al. (2020) further showed that Swedish girls produced higher-quality texts but reported self-efficacy levels comparable to boys, with both groups improving significantly following intervention. These contrasting findings indicate that gender differences in writing self-efficacy cannot be assumed to be universal.

The Moroccan evidence likewise remains inconclusive. Bouih et al. (2021) found higher general self-efficacy among female Moroccan EFL students, whereas Omari et al. (2020) reported no significant gender differences. Bouzar and El Idrissi (2025) further demonstrated that gender may shape how self-efficacy and other psychological factors relate to writing performance, with different patterns emerging for male and female students. Such findings suggest that gender warrants further examination, particularly in relation to domain-specific writing self-efficacy.

Overall, three gaps emerge from these above reviewed studies. First, although writing self-efficacy has been widely investigated internationally, Moroccan research remains relatively limited and has produced mixed findings. Second, existing Moroccan studies have often focused on general or academic self-efficacy, leaving writing-specific beliefs comparatively underexplored across different stages of undergraduate study. Third, evidence concerning gender differences remains inconsistent, while few studies have examined study level and gender together within the Moroccan EFL writing context. Addressing these gaps, the present study examines Moroccan EFL undergraduates' writing self-efficacy and investigates whether their beliefs differ according to study level and gender.

4. **Methods**

Study Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, collecting quantitative and qualitative data from Semester 2 and Semester 6 undergraduate students. This design enabled the comparison of students at different stages of their academic programs, providing insights into variations in perceived writing self-efficacy across levels of study. By integrating quantitative findings with qualitative explanations, the design offered a comprehensive understanding of how writing self-efficacy differs between cohorts and the factors that may account for these differences.

Context and Participants

The target population of the present study was EFL undergraduate students from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities in Abdelmalek Essaâdi University, Morocco. The sample included 94 (53.1%) male and 83 (46.9%) female students. The respondents' ages ranged between 18 and 25 (78.5%), between 26 and 35 (16.9%), and more than 35 years old (4.5%). 93 (52.5%) belong to semester 2 (freshmen), while 84 (47.5%) belong to semester 6 (juniors). As for sampling technique, a criterion-sampling scheme (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007) was deployed in this study. Specifically, the criteria used were that each participant was either a semester 2 or a semester 6 undergraduate student.

Instruments

Genre-Based Self-Efficacy Scale

We herein adopt Genre-based self-efficacy scale developed by Zhang et al. (2023). The scale consists of 16 items distributed over 4 factors; Linguistic self-efficacy (LS) (5 items) (e.g., "I can write compound and complex English sentences with grammatical structure"); Self-Regulatory Self-Efficacy (3 items) (e.g., I can think of different ways to help me to plan

before English writing); Class Performance Self-Efficacy (4 items) (e.g., I can understand the most complex material of writing presented by the instructor of the English course); Genre-Based Self-Efficacy (4 items) (e.g., I can write an English argumentation that includes arguments). Items are measured on a 7-point Likert scale from “not at all true of me” 1 to “very true of me” 7. The internal consistency estimates of the different factors of writing self-efficacy range from .78 to .84: Linguistic Self-Efficacy ($\alpha = .84$), Self-Regulatory Self-Efficacy ($\alpha = .80$), Class Performance Self-Efficacy ($\alpha = .78$), and Genre-Based Self-Efficacy ($\alpha = .80$). Overall self-efficacy ($\alpha = .91$). This indicates a good internal consistency across different subscales; that is, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were larger than the critical value of no less than 0.70 for satisfactory reliability.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with fourteen students, 6 from semester 2 (Freshmen) and 8 from semester 6 (Juniors) to explore their perceptions of the sources of writing self-efficacy beliefs. The interview schedule was created based on Bandura’s framework, which identifies mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states as the main sources of self-efficacy. This allowed for a focused exploration of how students interpret and draw upon these experiences in shaping their confidence as writers.

Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality and anonymity were assured. Quantitative data were collected from two undergraduate cohorts at different academic stages: Semester 2 students who had completed a paragraph-writing course and Semester 6 students working on their B.A. monographs. The data were cleaned, screened, coded, and analyzed using SPSS Version 26. Descriptive statistics and inferential analyses, specifically independent-samples *t*-tests, were conducted to examine differences between the two cohorts.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with fourteen participants to explore their perceptions and writing practices. The interview guide, which was pilot-tested, comprised six open-ended questions. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim using AssemblyAI, and analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase framework, allowing for a deeper exploration of students’ academic writing experiences and perceptions.

5. Results

The Levels of Perceived Writing Self-Efficacy

Descriptive statistics revealed variation in students’ perceived self-efficacy across the four domains. The highest mean score was reported in Linguistic Self-Efficacy ($M = 5.32$, $SD = 1.38$). This was followed by Self-Regulatory Self-Efficacy ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.79$) and Genre-Based Self-Efficacy ($M = 4.84$, $SD = 1.49$), indicating moderate levels of confidence in their ability to regulate their writing processes and to produce texts across different genres. The lowest mean score emerged in Class Performance Self-Efficacy ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 1.52$), suggesting that students were least confident in their ability to perform effectively on classroom writing tasks and assessments.

Table 1: Means and SDs for participants’ perceived SE

	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
LSE	177	940.80	5.3153	1.37884
SRSE	177	864.00	4.8814	1.78811
CPSE	177	771.50	4.3588	1.52203
GBSE	177	856.50	4.8390	1.49295

	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Valid N (listwise)	177			

Note. LSE = linguistic self-efficacy; SRSE = self-regulatory self-efficacy; CPSE = class-performance self-efficacy; GBSE = genre-based self-efficacy.

Self-Efficacy and Study Level

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare overall self-efficacy between students at academic levels S2 and S6. Descriptive statistics indicated that students at S2 ($n = 93$) had a mean overall self-efficacy score of 4.65 ($SD = 1.38$), whereas students at S6 ($n = 84$) had a mean score of 5.13 ($SD = 1.05$).

There was a statistically significant difference in overall self-efficacy between S2 ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.38$, $n = 93$) and S6 students ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.05$, $n = 84$), $t(175) = -2.59$, $p = .010$. Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met, $F(1, 175) = 3.79$, $p = .053$. When the assumption of unequal variances was applied, the result remained statistically significant, $t(170.28) = -2.62$, $p = .010$.

Table 2: Independent-samples t-test for SE and Study Level

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Overall SE	Semester 2	93	4.6478	1.37737	.14283
	Semester 6	84	5.1280	1.04915	.11447

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Overall SE	Equal variances assumed	3.792	.053	-2.588	175	.010	-.48013
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.623	170.276	.010	-.48013

Self-Efficacy and Gender Differences

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine whether overall self-efficacy differed by gender. There was no statistically significant difference in overall self-efficacy between female ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.24$, $n = 83$) and male students ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.25$, $n = 94$), $t(175) = -1.34$, $p = .182$. Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met, $F(1, 175) = 0.22$, $p = .641$. When the assumption of unequal variances was applied, the result remained non-significant, $t(172.61) = -1.34$, $p = .182$.

Table 3: Independent-samples t-test for SE and Gender

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Overall SE	Female	83	4.7417	1.24457	.13661
	Male	94	4.9940	1.25403	.12934

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Overall SE	Equal variances assumed	.219	.641	-1.340	175	.182	-.25230
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.341	172.609	.182	-.25230

Sources of Writing Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Mastery Experiences

Mastery experiences appeared to play an important role in shaping participants' writing self-efficacy. Participants often evaluated their writing abilities in relation to what they had previously managed to accomplish. Confidence, therefore, was not necessarily an established or stable belief; it could develop as participants accumulated experiences that convinced them that they were capable of handling particular writing demands. One participant, for example, linked her growing confidence directly to repeated writing practice:

"...with a lot of practice, I discovered that I can discuss ideas. I can construct solid arguments... It increased my confidence in expressing my ideas in a piece of paper." (Participant 3, Semester 2)

This reveals an important change in self-perception as the participant moved from uncertainty about her writing ability toward a recognition of what she could actually do. Her confidence appears to have developed not simply because she had practiced repeatedly, but because that practice resulted in experiences she interpreted as successful. In this sense, practice became meaningful when it provided evidence of capability. At the same time, her account suggests that confidence was closely tied to particular writing achievements, especially the ability to generate ideas and construct arguments. This may indicate that self-efficacy develops through specific experiences of competence rather than through practice alone. Another participant similarly referred to a successful writing experience, however, in this case the evidence of competence came primarily from external evaluation:

"...I knew that I wrote a good essay because of the mark, the professor of that module barely gives students good marks... I saved the draft ... and later I tried to follow the same structure in some modules." (Participant 6, Semester 2)

This excerpt indicates that the participant's confidence was strongly influenced by the grade he received, which he interpreted as confirmation that the essay was successful. His reference to the professor's usual grading practices further strengthened the meaning he attached to the mark. Yet, this raises an important distinction between confidence based on personal mastery and confidence based on external validation. While the successful grade provided reassurance, the participant did not rely solely on the feeling of having written well; he preserved the successful essay and attempted to reproduce its structure in later assignments. This suggests that the experience became a practical model for future writing. Mastery experiences, therefore, were not simply moments that made participants feel more confident; their influence depended on how participants interpreted the experience and whether they could transfer what they had learned to new writing situations.

Vicarious Experiences

The second source of writing self-efficacy is vicarious experiences. The latter emerged mainly through observing classmates and other successful writers. Such experiences were especially relevant when participants compared their own abilities with those of more proficient peers and considered whether similar success was attainable. One participant highlighted,

"...I have often observed classmates and friends who write excellent essays... At first, I used to compare myself and feel a bit insecure, but later I realized that their success could inspire me instead of discouraging me... If they can do it, I can too." (Participant 7, Semester 6)

This demonstrates that comparison with successful peers did not have a fixed effect. Initially, observing stronger writers generated insecurity, but the participant later reinterpreted their success as evidence that similar achievement was possible. This reflects a shift from self-comparison to perceived capability. Thus, students' confidence depended partly on how they interpreted the comparison. Another participant underlined,

“...I observed classmates who write good essays... whenever I got the chance I try to ask them about how they write and learn from them.” (Participant 4, Semester 2)

Unlike the previous participant, who mainly used peers as sources of inspiration, this participant deliberately sought to understand how successful classmates approached writing. Peer models therefore provided not only encouragement but also access to strategies and practices that could be incorporated into the participant's own writing. In short, these accounts indicate that successful peers functioned as accessible models of writing competence. Their influence was strongest when participants perceived their achievements as relevant and potentially attainable rather than as evidence of their own inadequacy.

Social Persuasion

The third source of writing self-efficacy is social persuasion. This was reflected in the encouragement, evaluation, and corrective feedback participants received from teachers and peers. Importantly, participants did not describe feedback as simple praise; constructive criticism also contributed to their writing development. One participant demonstrated,

“...I usually receive good feedback from my friends and my professors... My professors always insist that I need to write in a more academic way... Teachers were supporting us to continue practicing.” (Participant 3, Semester 2)

This account combines positive reinforcement with guidance for improvement. The encouragement from teachers and peers appears to have supported continued practice, while the emphasis on academic writing provided direction for further development. Another interviewee mentioned that,

“...Sometimes they tell me that my writing is strong... Other times, they point out areas that need improvement, like grammar or structure. Whether positive or critical, the feedback always pushes me to write better.” (Participant 2, Semester 6)

Here, the participant explicitly viewed both praise and criticism as productive. Positive comments confirmed existing strengths, whereas criticism identified specific areas requiring improvement. Rather than interpreting corrective feedback as evidence of inability, the participant perceived it as a stimulus for further development. This suggests that social persuasion supported self-efficacy when feedback was perceived as constructive. Encouragement validated participants' abilities and specific criticism provided direction for strengthening them.

Psychological and Emotional States

The fourth source of writing self-efficacy is psychological and emotional experiences. In this respect, the participants revealed a more complex relationship with writing self-efficacy. Nervousness, pressure, and motivation did not have a uniform effect; their influence depended on how students view and interpret their emotional responses to writing.

“...Whenever I am given an assignment, I feel nervous a little bit. But by mistakes we learn... mistakes help me to give it a try and improve my writing.” (Participant 5, Semester 2)

Although the participant experienced nervousness, she did not interpret it as a reason to avoid writing. Instead, mistakes were understood as part of the learning process. This suggests a constructive interpretation of difficulty. In contrast, another participant described a more discouraging experience:

“...When I get a writing assignment I feel a lot of pressure and even dislike it... I don't have the same energy or motivation to put in the effort anymore.” (Participant 4, Semester 6)

In this account, pressure was associated with reduced motivation and a negative orientation toward writing. Unlike the previous participant, who interpreted difficulty as an opportunity for improvement, this participant experienced it as diminishing the willingness to invest effort. The contrast illustrates that emotional states can influence writing engagement differently depending on how students experience and interpret them. This also shows that emotional

experiences could either coexist with persistence or contribute to disengagement. Psychological and emotional states therefore appeared to shape not only how participants felt about writing but also their willingness to engage with demanding writing tasks.

In short, across the four sources, participants' writing self-efficacy was grounded in actual writing accomplishments, observations of successful peers, interpersonal feedback, and emotional reactions to writing. The findings also indicate that these sources did not operate uniformly. A successful performance could strengthen confidence and guide later practice; peer comparison could initially create insecurity but later become a source of inspiration; feedback could validate strengths while directing improvement; and emotional difficulty could either be managed constructively or reduce motivation. Overall, this suggests that writing self-efficacy developed through participants' interpretation of their experiences, rather than through the experiences alone.

6. Discussion

Research Question 1

The first research question examined the overall state of perceived writing self-efficacy among Moroccan undergraduates. The findings show variation across the four dimensions assessed. Linguistic self-efficacy recorded the highest mean ($M = 5.32$), suggesting that students reported greater confidence in dealing with linguistic aspects of writing, such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction. This pattern is consistent with previous research showing that learners may develop stronger efficacy beliefs in areas that receive explicit instruction and regular feedback (Teng & Wang, 2022; Golparvar & Khafi, 2021). Self-regulatory self-efficacy ($M = 4.88$) and genre-based self-efficacy ($M = 4.84$) were comparatively moderate, indicating that students reported a reasonable but lower level of confidence in regulating their writing and handling different writing genres. The lowest mean was found for class performance self-efficacy ($M = 4.36$), suggesting comparatively less confidence in performing successfully in classroom writing situations. This pattern is consistent with research indicating that performance-related efficacy can be affected by task demands, evaluation, and students' ability to apply their knowledge in actual writing situations (Shen & Tao, 2025; Tabari et al., 2025).

Overall, the findings indicate that students' perceived writing self-efficacy varies across domains, with relatively higher confidence in linguistic aspects and lower confidence in classroom performance. These results should not be taken as direct evidence of students' actual linguistic competence or writing ability, but rather as differences in their perceived capabilities. Given this pattern, writing instruction could provide additional opportunities for strategy-based practice, genre-focused writing, formative feedback, and authentic performance tasks to strengthen efficacy beliefs in the comparatively weaker dimensions (Teng & Wang, 2023; Xu & Wang, 2024).

Research Question 2

The second research question examined whether writing self-efficacy differed by gender. The independent-samples t -test showed no statistically significant difference between female and male students in overall writing self-efficacy ($p = .182$). Although males reported a slightly higher mean score than females, the difference was small and non-significant. This finding is consistent with studies reporting non-significant gender differences in writing self-efficacy (Al-Kfaween, 2010; Grenner et al., 2020), although it contrasts with research reporting higher self-efficacy among female students (Anastasiou & Michail, 2013; Anam & Susanto, 2017). These mixed findings suggest that the relationship between gender and writing self-efficacy may vary across contexts.

Importantly, the present findings should not be interpreted as evidence that gender differences in writing self-efficacy are diminishing. Rather, they indicate that no statistically significant gender difference was detected in this particular sample. Other factors, such as prior

writing experience, motivation, learning strategies, or writing anxiety, may contribute to individual differences in writing self-efficacy and warrant further investigation.

Research Question 3

The third question examines whether perceived writing self-efficacy differs by educational level. The independent-samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in overall writing self-efficacy between students at different educational levels. Students at semester 6 (juniors) reported significantly higher self-efficacy than students at semester 2 (freshman). The mean difference suggests that students further along in their studies feel more confident in their writing abilities compared to those at earlier stages.

This result implies that academic progression is positively associated with perceived writing self-efficacy. One likely explanation is that students in semester 6 have accumulated more experience with academic writing, exposure to various genres, and feedback from instructors, which may have gradually enhanced their confidence. By contrast, Semester 2 students are still in the early stages of adapting to the demands of academic writing in English, which may explain their lower levels of self-efficacy. These findings are consistent with previous studies, such as Luo et al. (2023), Moussa (2023), Akram and Ghazanfar (2014), Truong and Wang (2019), Weda et al. (2018), Aziz and Quraishi (2017) and Omari et al. (2020), demonstrating a positive association between academic progression and self-efficacy. However, the results are inconsistent with Zaid (2020), who found no significant differences in self-efficacy across semester levels, suggesting that academic progression may not always strongly influence self-efficacy at early stages or in certain contexts. This contrast highlights that, while self-efficacy generally increases with educational level, contextual factors such as institutional setting, program structure, and cultural influences may also shape students' beliefs.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question examined Moroccan undergraduates' perceptions of the factors shaping their writing self-efficacy. The findings support Bandura's (1997) four sources of efficacy information, mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and psychological and affective states, and are consistent with the view that self-efficacy develops through learners' interpretations of their experiences rather than through experience alone.

Mastery experiences emerged as an important source of writing confidence. Participants described how successful writing performances, repeated practice, and positive evaluation strengthened their beliefs in their writing capabilities. This finding is consistent with Bandura's (1997) argument that interpreted success provides particularly powerful efficacy information and with Pajares et al. (2007), who emphasized the role of previous writing performance in shaping writing self-efficacy. It also complements research showing that writing self-efficacy is associated with writing development and performance (Chen & Zhang, 2019; Zabihi, 2018; Teng, 2022). Importantly, however, participants' accounts suggest that practice alone did not necessarily increase confidence; confidence appeared to strengthen when practice resulted in experiences that students interpreted as evidence of competence.

Vicarious experiences were reflected mainly in students' observations of successful classmates. This finding is consistent with Bandura's (1997, 2023) view that observing comparable others can provide information about one's own capabilities. The accounts further show that peer comparison could have contrasting effects, that is to say, observing competent peers initially generated insecurity for some participants but later became a source of motivation. This extends the literature by suggesting that the influence of peer models may depend on how students interpret the comparison. The finding is also consistent with the broader literature emphasizing the role of social and contextual factors in the development of writing self-efficacy (Teng & Wang, 2023).

Social persuasion was evident in participants' accounts of teacher and peer feedback. Students valued both positive comments and constructive criticism, particularly when feedback

identified specific areas for improvement. This is consistent with Bandura's (1997) conceptualization of verbal persuasion and with research linking writing self-efficacy to feedback and corrective input (Teng & Teng, 2024; Wardana et al., 2025). The present findings suggest that feedback may contribute to efficacy beliefs not simply by providing encouragement, but also by giving students a clearer sense of how they can improve their writing.

Finally, psychological and affective states showed a more complex relationship with writing self-efficacy. Some participants experienced nervousness but interpreted mistakes as opportunities to learn, whereas others associated writing pressure with reduced motivation and willingness to engage. This finding is consistent with Usher and Pajares (2006b), who argue that anxiety and other affective states can influence efficacy judgments. It also corresponds with recent research linking writing self-efficacy with writing anxiety (Shen & Tao, 2025). The contrasting accounts suggest that emotional experiences do not necessarily have a uniform effect; their influence may depend on how students interpret and respond to them.

In short, the findings reinforce the multidimensional and context-sensitive nature of writing self-efficacy identified in previous research (Teng & Wang, 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). They further suggest that Moroccan undergraduates' efficacy beliefs are shaped by a combination of successful writing experiences, peer models, feedback, and emotional responses, with the meaning students assign to these experiences playing an important role. This qualitative evidence complements the quantitative findings by showing how students themselves understand the experiences underlying their writing self-efficacy. In this respect, the findings extend existing research by illustrating how Bandura's sources of efficacy information are experienced and interpreted within the Moroccan EFL writing context.

7. Conclusions and Implications

The present study sought to investigate the overall level of writing self-efficacy among Moroccan EFL undergraduates and whether it varies across gender and study levels. The findings indicated that Moroccan undergraduates exhibit a multidimensional pattern of writing self-efficacy. Students reported the highest confidence in linguistic skills, moderate confidence in self-regulation and genre-based writing, and the lowest confidence in performance-oriented tasks. No significant gender differences were observed, while self-efficacy was found to vary according to study level, with semester 6 students (juniors) reporting higher confidence than semester 2 students (freshmen). These results suggest that writing self-efficacy is domain-specific, develops progressively with experience, and is shaped more by instructional exposure and practice than by gender.

To address these gaps, instructional design should move beyond a primary focus on grammar and vocabulary, integrating explicit training in metacognitive writing strategies such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating. Scaffolded assignments alongside reflective exercises can strengthen higher-order skills and increase students' confidence in adapting to different genres and writing contexts. Additionally, providing practice under evaluative conditions can improve readiness to transfer skills to graded assessments.

Given the lack of gender differences, interventions need not be differentiated by gender but should focus on individual learner characteristics, such as prior experience, motivation, and strategy use. Structured support for lower-level students, including gradual exposure to complex writing tasks, targeted feedback, and mentorship, can accelerate self-efficacy development and bridge the confidence gap between novice and advanced learners. Creating inclusive, collaborative writing environments ensures equitable opportunities for all students to enhance both skill and confidence in academic writing.

Despite its contributions, the present study has several limitations. First, its cross-sectional design provides a snapshot of students' writing self-efficacy and does not allow conclusions about developmental change over time or causal relationships. Second, the study was conducted at a single university with a relatively modest sample of 177 students, which may

limit the generalizability of the findings. The small interview sample ($n = 14$) may also have restricted the diversity of qualitative perspectives. Third, reliance on self-report measures may have introduced response biases and may not fully reflect students' actual writing-related capabilities. Future studies could combine self-report measures with performance-based and process-oriented methods. Finally, the study compared only two academic levels (Semester 2 and Semester 6), limiting the examination of differences across students' broader university trajectory. Future research could include three or more study levels and adopt longitudinal designs to better investigate changes in writing self-efficacy over time.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Genre-based L2 writing self-efficacy scale (Zhang et al., 2023)

We would like you to tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by simply ticking (✓) a number from (not at all true of me) 1 to (very true of me) 7. We are interested in your real situation and attitudes. Please do not leave out any of the items.

1. I can correctly use all parts of speech (e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.) in writing.
2. I can write a simple English sentence with grammatical structure.
3. I can write compound and complex English sentences with grammatical structure.
4. I can write a good English paragraph with topic sentence or main idea.
5. I can write an English composition with a clear organization or structure.
6. I can realize my goal to improve my English writing.
7. I can think of my goals before English writing.
8. I can think of different ways to help me to plan before English writing.
9. I can get an excellent grade for writing in the English course.
10. I can understand the most difficult writing material presented in the English course.
11. I can understand the basic concepts of writing taught in the English course.
12. I can understand the most complex material of writing presented by the instructor of the English course.

13. I can write an English narrative that includes several things that happened to the characters.
14. I can write an English narrative that describes clearly how the events develop.
15. I can write an English argumentation that includes arguments.
16. I can write an English argumentation that includes sufficient evidence to support the arguments.

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell me about a time you wrote an essay or piece of writing that you felt proud of? How did that experience affect your confidence in writing?
2. Have you observed classmates, friends, or people you admire successfully complete writing tasks? How did seeing them succeed influence your own confidence?
3. What kind of feedback or encouragement do you receive from teachers, family, or friends about your writing? How does it affect your confidence?
4. How do you feel when you are given a writing assignment, and how do these feelings influence the way you approach writing?
5. Can you describe a difficult writing task you struggled with? What strategies did you use to overcome it, and how did that experience influence your confidence in writing?
6. When you think about future writing tasks, what makes you feel confident or less confident about your ability to succeed?