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## First-Year Students' Self-Efficacy in Basic Writing

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### Abstract

*First-semester students face a transition period as an adaptation process to prepare themselves for changes in the academic environment. Students who have difficulty adjusting to changes and new academic demands tend to feel stressed and face various conflicts in meeting the demands of the academic environment which can influence their self-efficacy. The purpose of this study was to determine the role of self-efficacy in basic writing of first-year students of the English Language Education Study Program. The researchers obtained data from 26 students of the Basic Writing Course using a quantitative approach. Data were collected through questionnaires and reflections. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics. From the data analysis, the researchers found that the self-efficacy of first-year students was relatively high, with an average self-efficacy score of 3.9. This shows that self-efficacy needs to be considered as one of the key factors that influence the process and outcomes of student learning especially in Basic writing course. This study*

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*shows that the dimensions of Strength, Level, and Generality are interrelated in influencing students' self-confidence and writing adjustment in the first year of University. Therefore, educators need to explain the role of self-efficacy to students in supporting their success in learning, as well as providing support to increase students' confidence in their abilities in learning and writing.*

**Keywords:** *self-efficacy, First-year students, Basic Writing*

## **A. Introduction**

First-semester students usually face a transition period as an adaptation process to prepare themselves for changes in the academic environment. Students who have difficulty adjusting to changes and new academic demands tend to feel stressed and encounter various conflicts in meeting the demands of the academic environment. To adapt to a different academic environment, students need to make adjustment. Adaptation is an effort for someone to adjust themselves to other people and new environments (Schneiders, 1964) . As student who has just entered their first year in University, of course they need to go through an adjustment process because the learning environment in college is different from the previous environment. Unfortunately, not everyone has the same ability to adapt. Some can easily adjust, while others have great difficulty adapting to their surroundings. Many researchers have highlighted how students adapt to their first year of University. Some researchers found that the difficulties faced by students in their first year of University include academic, social, and cultural aspects (Alina V Katrevich & Mara S Aruguete, 2017; Wu et al., 2015; Zhou & Zhang, 2014). On the other hand, Wangeri et al., (2012) found that first-year students experience difficulties including personal autonomy, social relationships, compatibility among roommates, accessing support services, feeding habits and adjustment to the academic programme.

Badelina, (2020) ; Scherer and Guttersrud, (2018) revealed that adaptability is related to the process of belief formation. Badelina, (2020) stated that psychological conditions are one of the factors that influence self-adjustment. Psychological conditions include the mental state of a healthy individual, an individual who has healthy mental abilities to manage themselves effectively in behavior. The formation of behavior is not only influenced by information and individual beliefs about their strengths and weaknesses but also by the extent to which individuals feel able to regulate their behavior (Bandura, 1997). The ability to manage and regulate this behavior is known as self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994), is a belief in a person's ability to organize and carry out a series of appropriate actions to achieve the expected results. This belief is a sense of trust in one's abilities that encourages someone to achieve something they want. Therefore, students who have high self-efficacy in their abilities will be more persistent and not easily give up even though they face difficulties and obstacles. There are three dimensions of self-efficacy namely, the Magnitude/Level dimension, Generality dimension, and Strength dimension (Bandura, 1994). Magnitude is related to the degree of difficulty of the task at hand. A person's acceptance and belief in a task vary, perhaps people are limited to simple, medium, or difficult tasks. Each individual's perception will differ in viewing the level of difficulty of a task. Some consider a task difficult, while others may not feel the same. If there are few obstacles faced in carrying out the task, then the task will be easy to do. The generality dimension is the extent to which an individual believes in his/her abilities in various task situations, from performing a common activity or a specific situation that has never been done to a series of difficult and varied tasks or situations. Generality is a sense of ability that an individual shows in different task contexts, whether through behavior, cognition, or affectivity. The strength dimension is the intensity of a person's belief in their abilities. This is related to the resilience and tenacity of the individual in fulfilling their tasks. Individuals who have strong beliefs and steadfastness in their ability to complete a task will continue to persist in their efforts even though they experience many difficulties and challenges. Experience influences the self-efficacy that a person believes in. Weak experiences will weaken the

individual's beliefs as well. Individuals who have strong beliefs in their abilities will be steadfast in their efforts to overcome the difficulties they face.

Many researchers have highlighted studies on self-efficacy in students (Morton et al., 2014; Mulu et al., 2023; Bodner, 2015; Byrne et al., 2014; Chemers et al., 2001; Febrian et al., 2025; Nisfary et al., 2023 Shen & Bai, 2024; Philippakos et al., 2023; Bensalem & Idri, 2022) . In previous studies, the main focused only on students' self-efficacy in a general context or at the secondary education level and in teaching practicum. In addition, previous researchers also revealed that environmental factors, social support, and learning experiences affect a students' level of self-efficacy. However, there has been little focus on how self-efficacy in first-year students in the Basic Writing course. As new students at university, they experience significant changes in the academic environment. The academic demands in college are higher compared to those in high school. In addition, as students in the English Education study program, they began to pursue academic writing skills in a foreign language. The Basic Writing course became an initial challenge for them, as they had to build confidence in writing, understand the structure of academic writing, and develop critical thinking skills in writing. Self-efficacy in this context is an important factor that can affect students' motivation, perseverance, and learning outcomes in academic writing. This research is important to conduct because students' self-efficacy, especially at the beginning of their studies, plays an important role in determining academic success, learning motivation, and adaptation to the college environment. In addition, the findings of this study can provide useful insights for educators and institutions in designing learning strategies that support the development of students' self-efficacy optimally.

## **B. Methods**

This study used a quantitative approach to investigate the self-efficacy of first-year English Education students in Basic Writing Course. Data were collected through questionnaires and reflections from 26 students in a private University, in Yogyakarta. The 26 students were those who took the Basic Writing course. The questionnaire was designed based on a Likert scale with five response options (strongly disagree to strongly

agree) to evaluate three dimensions of self-efficacy: level, generality, and strength (Bandura, 1997). The questionnaire consisted of 11 closed-ended questions designed to obtain information about students' self-efficacy in Basic Writing. In addition, students' reflections were used to dig deeper into the factors that influence their self-efficacy. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, including the mean of each statement in the questionnaire. Students' reflections were also analyzed qualitatively to identify factors that influence their self-efficacy.

### C. Result and Discussion

The discussion below aims to measure students' self-efficacy and identify the factors that influence students' self-efficacy in the first year.

No.	Dimension	Statement	Mean
1	<i>Level</i>	I like challenging assignments in the writing course	3.3
2		I consider every assignment in writing given by the lecturer to be a challenge	3.7
3		I like new things and challenges in completing writing assignments that the lecturer has given	3.8
4	<i>Generality</i>	I believe that I will get what I want as long as it is accompanied by hard work	4.5
5		I am increasingly excited about writing skill assignments when I see	3.8

		other people usually completing their assignments.	
6		I consider obstacles to be a part of and process that must be passed	3.8
7		I can complete writing assignments both individually and in groups.	4.2
8	<i>Strength</i>	I always finish my assignments in writing course on time	4.3
9		I have a positive reaction to the criticism given in the writing course	3.8
10		I try to get maximum results in every writing course assignment	4.5
11		In my writing assignments, I feel confident and I think I am going to make it	3.9
Mean			3.9

**Table 1. Students' Sel- Efficacy in Basic Writing**

Descriptive statistics are listed in Table 1. The average score for the measurement of self-efficacy of first-year students in basic writing indicated a mean score of self-efficacy of 3.9. Interpretation of the standard deviation score showed that most students' scores ranged from 3 to 4. The correlation coefficient demonstrated the strength of the relationship between self-efficacy and the variables tested. The results indicated that self-efficacy among first-semester students in Basic Writing was high.

The researchers elaborate on the three dimensions of students' self-efficacy in table 2 to table 4.

**Table 2. Level Dimension**

No.	Statement	Mean
1	I like challenging assignments in the writing course	3.3
2	I consider every assignment in writing given by the lecturer to be a challenge	3.7
3	I like new things and challenges in completing writing assignments that the lecturer has given	3.8
	Mean	3.6

**Table 3. Generality Dimension**

No.	Statement	Mean
4	I believe that I will get what I want as long as it is accompanied by hard work	4.5
5	I am increasingly excited about writing skill assignments when I see other people usually completing their assignments.	3.8
6	I consider obstacles to be a part of and process that must be passed	3.8
7	I can complete writing assignments both individually and in groups	4.2
	Mean	3.9

**Table 4. Strength Dimension**

No.	Statement	Mean
8	I always finish my assignments in writing course on time	4.3



<b>9</b>	I have a positive reaction to the criticism given in writing course.	3.8
<b>10</b>	I try to get maximum results in every writing course assignments	4.5
<b>11</b>	In my writing assignments, I feel confident and I think I am going to make it	3.9
Mean		4.1

From Table 2 to Table 4, it can be seen that the Strength dimension has the highest average value (4.1) compared to the Level (3.6) and Generality (3.9) dimensions. This shows that students demonstrate a stronger commitment in terms of completing assignments on time, accepting criticism, striving for good results, and having confidence in completing writing assignments.

In analyzing data from students' reflections, self-efficacy is influential in shaping students' self-efficacy in writing and their adjustments at the beginning of semester one lecture. In reflecting on their experiences, various speculations emerged in all students. Almost all students mentioned that they were not confident in their English skills at the beginning of the semester. They felt less confident because their knowledge of writing in English was still lacking. For example, students 04, 08, and 09 expressed low confidence due to grammar issues and felt that their writing skill was very poor. This problem led to low self-efficacy at the beginning of the semester:

*I Wasn't confident, because I knew nothing (grammar, tenses, finite verbs, and many others).*

On the other hand, at the beginning of the semester, some students felt worried and lacked confidence in their writing skills. For example, students 13 and 16 as mentioned in statement 01, felt insecure because many of their friends were better at writing:

*At first, I didn't feel confident because I thought many of my friends were better at writing skills. However, as time goes by, I become confident.*

Some students felt confused about how to write in English correctly. For example, students 06, 22, and 24 as mentioned in statement 01, were still confused and did not know how to write in English correctly. One student revealed:

*I was not very confident in writing because whenever I tried to write in English, for example, in my diary, I got stuck on words that I didn't know how to say in English, But actually, I like writing.*

In the second statement, some students revealed that the factors that influenced their self-efficacy in developing their writing skills were their poor knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, which made them believe their writing skills were still inadequate. Another factor affecting their self-efficacy in writing was the lack of practice. For example, students 07, 08, 15, 21, and 22 felt less confident because their grammar was still limited, as stated:

*With a lot of obstacles, I need to learn more about how to write correctly. My skills, which are still poor, like my grammar, and vocabulary.*

In the third statement, almost all students had the same strategies for maintaining their self-efficacy in basic writing course. Their strategy for maintaining self-efficacy in basic writing was to read more grammar books to increase their knowledge of writing skills. They also revealed that they would continue practicing writing to improve their writing skills in English. Additionally, they planned to read novels/manga and watch films to expand their vocabulary. For example, student 09 revealed:

*Practice more, like reading novels/manga or writing something in English, and I think I should improve my grammar and vocabulary by watching films.*

In the last statement, all students felt more confident than before in their writing skills. This change was due to the new knowledge they gained from their lecturers on how to write well and correctly. Some students also mentioned that the challenges of the assignments given by the lecturer made them confident in their writing skills:

*Now I am getting more confident in writing. My lecturer guides us very well in this way. What he gave us was not only material but also the problems that are commonly found in writing. According to our assignments, he helped us identify the common problems in writing and I was very helpful.*

Based on the results of data analysis, it is explained that first-year students have high self-efficacy. This indicates that students who have high self-efficacy tend to be able to adapt well and have good confidence in writing. This finding is in line with the findings revealed by Wening, (2016). On the other hand, this finding is inversely proportional to the findings of Bensalem & Idri, (2022). He found that students' self-efficacy in writing showed low to moderate. Students feel demotivation and frustration when writing.

Interesting findings were found in this study. In contrast to the questionnaires distributed, in the reflection results they wrote, it was found that most students still felt less confident with their writing skills at the beginning of the semester. They were often confused when writing due to their lack of vocabulary and knowledge of grammar. They added that they felt insecure about the ability of their classmates who were already good at writing.

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to achieve a particular goal or task (Heslin, 2006). When students have high self-efficacy, they will be more confident, excited, and motivated to face challenges in writing, as well as more adaptable to the learning process. On the other hand, when students have low self-efficacy, they are more likely to feel anxious, hesitant, and easily feel depressed or frustrated when facing a writing task, which can affect their motivation and performance on the task.

This indicates that students' commitment to completing the task is the main factor that helps them adjust to their first year at university, not how much they perceive the task as a challenge (Level) or their general belief in their effort and learning process (Generality).

### **Level Dimension**

The Level dimension is related to the extent to which students feel challenged in completing writing assignments. Findings from the data show that initially, many students felt less confident because they considered writing in English a big challenge. This is due to a lack of knowledge about grammar, vocabulary, and how to write correctly. For example, some students feel hampered by grammar problems and are unsure of their abilities. According to Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997), feelings of lack of competence in facing these challenges affect their low self-confidence. This is in line with Badelina's research, (2020) which shows that new students tend to feel pressured by high academic demands, especially in writing skills at the university level.

However, over time, most students began to feel more confident. This shows that there is an adaptation process that occurs, where they begin to feel more capable of facing the challenges that exist. This adjustment reflects an increase in self-efficacy, which is a key factor in students' adjustment in their first year (Zimmerman, 2000).

### **Strength Dimension**

The Strength dimension reflects students' persistence and commitment to completing writing assignments. Based on the findings, students who have a strong commitment to improving their writing skills tend to be more successful in adjusting to the academic demands of college. The strategies they use, such as reading grammar books, writing more often, and trying to improve vocabulary skills, indicate that they have the persistence to continue to improve. Research by Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) suggests that persistence and self-confidence greatly influence students' academic success. Therefore, students who show a high commitment to learning and improving their writing skills have a greater chance of succeeding in facing academic challenges in their first year.

### **Generality Dimension**

The Generality dimension relates to students' beliefs in their ability to develop and deal with various situations. Some students expressed that their low knowledge of grammar and vocabulary made them feel unable to write well. However, most students

began to feel more confident after receiving support from their instructors, who not only provided materials but also helped them identify common writing problems. This suggests that supportive learning experiences can increase students' self-confidence in facing writing assignments, which is very important in their adjustment process in the first year (Bandura, 1997).

The relationship between these three dimensions can be seen in how students not only rate tasks based on their perceived difficulty (Level), but also how confident they are in their ability to cope with the task (Strength), as well as how confident they are that success in one area can be applied to a range of other situations (Generality). Research shows that commitment to task completion (which is related to Strength and Generality) is more important in students' adjustment in their first year of university than simply viewing tasks as challenging (which is related to Magnitude/Level).

#### **Adjustment in the First Year**

Students' adjustment in the first year of university is greatly influenced by how confident they are in their academic abilities, especially in writing skills. The findings show that initially, students feel less confident. This finding is in line with Byrne et al., (2014) who stated that many students lacked the confidence to participate fully in the academic activities associated with their assignments. However, when first-year students receive support from lecturers and continue to practice, they can increase their confidence over time.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Overall, first-year students' self-efficacy indicated high. This study shows that the Strength, Level, and Generality dimensions are interrelated in influencing students' writing confidence and adjustment in their first year of university. Students who demonstrate a strong commitment to improving their writing skills and confidently embrace academic challenges are better able to adapt to the academic demands of university. Their successful adjustment is driven by their belief in their abilities and the

support they receive from their lecturers, which helps them overcome initial barriers to writing skills.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature on Self-Efficacy in academic contexts by confirming the relationship between the dimensions of self-efficacy and first-year students' adjustment in University. This study also opens up opportunities for further research on factors that influence self-efficacy in writing, such as previous writing experience, social support, and students' learning styles. In addition, from a practical perspective, these findings suggest that lecturers can improve students' self-efficacy in academic writing by providing constructive feedback, offering challenges appropriate to students' competency levels, and creating a supportive learning environment so that students feel more confident in their writing skills. Therefore, further research can explore how the interaction between these factors can either strengthen or hinder the development of student's writing skills in the early years of college.

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