

Iraqi EFL University Students' Language Ego and Writing Performance

Zahraa Khalid Jaffar

Prof. Salam Hamid Abbas, Ph.D.

Department of English, College of Education/Ibn Rushd for Human Sciences

University Of Baghdad, Baghdad, IRAQ

zahraa.kheder2307m@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Email: salam.hamid@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Abstract

Language learning is closely tied to various psychological and affective factors that influence students' ability and willingness to communicate. One of these factors is language ego, which reflects the learner's emotional attachment to the target language and their self-perception as language users. This study investigates the correlation between Iraqi EFL university students' language ego and their performance in writing. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) identify the level of language ego among Iraqi EFL university students, (2) assess their level of performance in writing, and (3) determine the correlation between language ego and writing performance.

The study adopts a descriptive correlational research design. The sample consists of 350 third-year students from the Colleges of Education at Tikrit University, Baghdad University, and Maysan University during the academic year 2024–2025. Two instruments are used for data collection: the Language Ego Questionnaire (adopted from Farsad, 2023) and a Writing Test to measure students' performance in writing. The validity and reliability of the instruments are verified prior to their administration.

Statistical analysis of the results reveals that Iraqi EFL university students have a generally good level of language ego. Their performance in writing is at a moderate level. A statistically significant positive correlation exists between language ego and writing performance. The results also suggest that language ego is a contributing factor to writing ability, although other pedagogical and psychological variables may also influence student performance. In light of these findings, the study presents a number of recommendations for future research.

Key words: (Language Ego, writing Performance, EFL students).

الأنا اللغوية والأداء الكتافي لدى طلبة الجامعة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الانكليزية لغة اجنبية

زهراء خالد جعفر

أ.د. سلام حامد عباس

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية / كلية التربية / ابن رشد للعلوم الإنسانية

جامعة بغداد، بغداد، العراق

zahraa.kheder2307m@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq

salam.hamid@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq

الملخص

يرتبط تعلم اللغة ارتباطاً وثيقاً بالعديد من العوامل النفسية والانفعالية التي تؤثر في قدرة الطلبة واستعدادهم للتواصل. ومن بين هذه العوامل، "الأنا اللغوية"، التي تعكس الارتباط العاطفي للمتعلم باللغة المستهدفة وإدراكه لذاته بوصفه مستخدماً لها. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقصي العلاقة بين الأنا اللغوية لدى طلبة الجامعات العراقيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية وأدائهم في مهارة الكتابة. وبشكل أكثر تحديداً، تسعى الدراسة إلى: (١) تحديد مستوى الأنا اللغوية لدى طلبة الجامعات العراقيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية، (٢) تقويم مستوى أدائهم في الكتابة، و(٣) تحديد العلاقة بين الأنا اللغوية والأداء في الكتابة.

اعتمدت الدراسة التصميم الوصفي الارتباطي، واعتمدت العينة على (٣٥٠) طالباً وطالبة من المرحلة الثالثة في كليات التربية بجامعات تكريت وبغداد وميسان للعام الدراسي ٢٠٢٤-٢٠٢٥. استخدمت أداتان لجمع البيانات: استبانة الأنا اللغوية (مقتبسة من Farsad ، ٢٠٢٣ ، واختبار كتافي لقياس أداء الطلبة في الكتابة. جرى التحقق من الصدق والثبات للأداتين قبل تطبيقهما.

أظهر التحليل الإحصائي للنتائج أن طلبة الجامعات العراقيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية يمتلكون مستوى جيداً عموماً من الأنا اللغوية، وأن أدائهم في الكتابة كان بمستوى متوسط. كما تبين وجود علاقة ارتباطية إيجابية ذات دلالة إحصائية بين الأنا اللغوية والأداء في الكتابة. وتشير النتائج أيضاً إلى أن الأنا اللغوية عامل يسهم في القدرة الكتابية، على الرغم من أن متغيرات تعليمية ونفسية أخرى قد تؤثر في أداء الطلبة. وفي ضوء هذه النتائج، تقدم الدراسة عدداً من التوصيات للبحوث المستقبلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: (الأنا اللغوية، الأداء الكتافي، طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية).

1. Introduction

1.1 The problem and its significance

Writing is a crucial skill in language development, as it demonstrates the evolution of a learner's language system. Nasser (2019) claims that it is a fundamental life skill, and writing skills are a central focus in EFL learning contexts. Students must be proficient in writing, including formality, objectivity, and complexity, to effectively use English. Writing is a foundational pillar in foreign language education and a necessary ability in daily life (Goh & Burns, 2012).

However, Sagban (2015) reports that many Iraqi EFL students struggle with writing, attributed to various factors, including learner characteristics and the learning environment. Psychological, cognitive, and contextual variables often influence students' writing performance. One psychological variable that influences students' performance in writing is language ego, which describes the identity formed in connection with the language they are learning (Farsad, 2023). This concept may significantly affect how learners perform in written communication, especially within the EFL context in Iraq. The present study aims to address the research questions:

1. What is the level of language ego among Iraqi EFL university students?
2. What is the level of writing performance among Iraqi EFL university students?
3. Is there a relationship between language ego and writing performance among Iraqi EFL university students?

1.2 Aims

This study aims at:

1. identifying Iraqi EFL university students' language ego level.
2. identifying Iraqi EFL university students' performance in writing skill.
3. finding out the correlation between Iraqi EFL university students' language ego and performance in writing skill.

1.3 Limits

This study is limited to Iraqi EFL 3rd year students in the departments of English/ colleges of Education (except for Kurdistan Region) for the academic year 2024/2025.

1.4 Value of study

This study is hoped to be valuable to:

1. Students, by raising their awareness of how language ego affects their writing performance, helping them write more confidently and with less anxiety.
2. Teachers, by offering insights into the impact of language ego on writing, guiding more supportive teaching strategies.
3. Curriculum designers and stakeholders, by highlighting the need to consider psychological factors like language ego when developing writing-focused curricula.
4. Educational institutions, by informing policies and training programs aimed at improving students' writing through emotionally supportive environments.

2. Literature review

2.1 Language Ego

The concept of **language ego**, closely associated with identity and self, has been extensively discussed in fields such as psychoanalysis, education, and social psychology (Zakarneh, 2018). It was first introduced by Guiora to describe the identity shift experienced by learners when using a foreign language (Guiora & Acton, 1990).

Ego boundaries, originating from ego psychology, are considered an influential factor in language acquisition (Zakarneh, 2018). They can be viewed from two perspectives: as a **personality trait** and as a **learning style** (Więckowska, 2011). As a personality trait, ego boundaries enable individuals to separate experiences, protect identity, and maintain balance among different aspects of self. Their permeability and flexibility affect self-perception and worldview (Ehrman, 1999). As a learning style, thick or thin boundaries influence cognitive flexibility and coping strategies, affecting learners' attitudes toward language learning, which often involves stress and identity challenges (Więckowska, 2011).

Foreign language learning is a cognitively and socially demanding process, often requiring learners to develop a new linguistic identity (Brown, 1999). Brown (2000) emphasizes that language ego is part of the affective domain, leading learners to adopt new cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns, which can cause anxiety or defensiveness when their self-concept is threatened. Similarly, Singleton and Ryan (2004) liken language ego to body

ego, describing it as a “maturation concept” tied to self-boundary development. They argue that ego rigidity increases with age, explaining why adults face greater challenges in acquiring a foreign language.

2.2 Writing Performance

Writing is widely regarded as a tool for conveying ideas clearly and systematically through proper sentence and paragraph structures, coherence, and accuracy in spelling and grammar (Harmer, 2007). It is described as a complex process that involves planning, drafting, reviewing, and revising (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Beyond arranging letters, writing is a way of thinking, learning, and sharing ideas (Zimmerman & Rodriguez, 1992), and it requires selecting, organizing, and expressing ideas effectively (Hyland, 2009; Nunan, 2003).

Writing is considered both a process and a product. Approaching it as a process—through practice and revision—leads to improvement (Richards & Schmidt, 2002; Tuan, 2010). It is an active and productive skill that plays a critical role in academic achievement and lifelong communication (Matsuda & Silva, 2001). Despite its importance, writing remains one of the most challenging skills for language learners because it involves cognitive effort, creativity, and organization (Brown, 2001; Erkan & Saban, 2001).

Writing serves multiple purposes: communication, self-expression, and academic evaluation (Al-Gharabally, 2015). It fosters learning, critical thinking, and reasoning, while supporting the development of other language skills (Nodushan, 2014). Writing tasks may vary in genres and goals—such

as expressive, persuasive, or instructive—and include essays, reports, letters, and narratives (McKay, 2007).

Effective writing requires clarity, organization, and style, making it essential for education and professional success (Briesmaster & Etchegaray, 2017; Harmer, 2007). As a fundamental classroom activity, writing enables learners to express ideas, reflect on experiences, and develop linguistic competence (Raimes, 1987). Ultimately, the ability to produce accurate and coherent written work is a core objective of EFL learning and a prerequisite for academic and professional communication (Finocchiaro, 1986; Erkan & Saban, 2011).

2.2.1 Components of Writing

Writing quality depends on several key components:

- 1. Organization** – Refers to the logical arrangement of ideas, including an effective introduction, coherent sequence of sentences and paragraphs, and a clear conclusion that ensures clarity and flow (Ghafar & Mohamedamin, 2022).
- 2. Content** – Represents the substance of writing such as ideas, arguments, and information relevant to the purpose. Strong and meaningful content is essential for effective communication (Ghafar & Mohamedamin, 2022).
- 3. Grammar** – A critical element for accuracy and clarity. It includes correct sentence structure, agreement, tense, and proper use of articles, pronouns, and prepositions (Brown, 2001).

4. **Mechanics** – Covers technical aspects like punctuation, capitalization, spelling, citation, and overall neatness, ensuring the text is readable and properly formatted (Weigle, 2002).
5. **Style** – Involves the writer's tone, voice, and expression, including word choice and sentence patterns, which give individuality and enhance the reader's experience (Gautam, 2019; Ahmed, 2012).

2.2.2 Writing Challenges

Writing is considered one of the most difficult language skills for EFL learners (Al-Gharabally, 2015). These challenges generally fall into three main categories: **cognitive**, **linguistic**, and **psychological**.

1. Cognitive Challenges

Writing involves complex thinking processes such as generating ideas, organizing them, and revising (Rahmat, 2020). It requires working memory to manage multiple tasks like text generation and planning simultaneously (Flower & Hayes, 1980). Limited working memory can negatively affect text quality (Kellogg et al., 2007). Language transfer is another cognitive factor; learners often rely on their L1 structures, leading to interference in L2 writing (Ellis, 2008). Differences between L1 and L2 increase the likelihood of errors, making it difficult for learners to produce coherent and fluent texts (Nunan, 2003).

2. Linguistic Challenges

Students face difficulties in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary (Wise, 2015). Grammar errors include issues with sentence structure, subject-verb agreement, tense consistency, and paragraph organization (Kroll, 2013). Spelling mistakes and incorrect punctuation—such as misuse of commas and capitalization—also hinder writing performance. Limited vocabulary forces learners to use inadequate expressions, restricting fluency and clarity (Rabab'ah, 2007).

3. Psychological Challenges

Writing in a foreign language can cause anxiety, fear of mistakes, and lack of confidence (Farooq, 2020). These affect motivation and fluency, ultimately reducing overall writing performance (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017).

3. Methodology

3.1 Population and sample

Creswell and Gutterman (2019) define a population as a group of people sharing similar characteristic(s). Likewise, Polit and Hunglar (1999) describe the population as “a collection or sum of all events, topics, or individuals that fulfil a set of criteria” (p.37). The population of this study covers all Iraqi EFL third-year university students in the departments of English within the colleges of education for human sciences throughout Iraq, except for the Kurdistan Region.

The sample of the current study consists of 350 third-year college students who are selected randomly from the departments of English in the colleges of education in three universities (Tikrit University, Baghdad University, Maysan University). See table (3.1).

University	Sample	
Tikrit	94	
Baghdad	177	
Maysan	79	
Total	350	

3.2 Research Design

To determine the relationship between Language Ego and writing performance among Iraqi EFL university students, this study used a descriptive correlational methodology.

3.3 Instruments

Two instruments are employed to accomplish the current study's aims; Language Ego Questionnaire and writing skill test.

3.3.1 Language Ego Questionnaire (LEQ)

To find out students' LE, Farsad's LEQ (2023) is adopted. This questionnaire consists of (16) items divided into three categories: Personality traits (1-6), Cognitive styles (7-12), and Environmental factors (13-16). Each item in the questionnaire is answered on a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree), which are given the scores (5, 4, 3, 2, 1) respectively.

3.3.2 Writing Performance Test

Writing Performance Test is devoted to assesses students' writing performance by requiring them to write an essay on a single topic, ranging from 250 to 300 words. The topic's relevance and authenticity are considered. Jury members select the most appropriate topic, and the test is based on the study's objectives. The Brown (2019) scoring scheme is used, with the highest score being 25 and the lowest being 5. The rubric includes five components: Organization, Content, Grammar, Punctuation, and Style and Expression.

3.4 Validity

Validity is a fundamental component of study design and the selection of research instruments. It is an assessment of the effectiveness of a research instrument in fulfilling its intended purpose (Mills & Gay, 2019). In the current study, face validity and construct validity are checked.

3.4.1 Face Validity

According to Davies (1999), Face validity refers to a test or instrument's ability to meet the expectations of its users, including creators, administrators, educators, and examinees. To evaluate face validity, as articulated by Salkind & Rasmussen (2010), assessments must be submitted to experts with extensive knowledge of the research topic. Jury members in ELT fields review instruments to ensure they meet the study's aims, generally agreeing on their suitability.

3.4.2 construct validity

Construct validity is the accuracy of a study instrument in assessing the trait, theoretical capability, or construct it is designed to evaluate. It refers to the extent to which a set of variables accurately represents the construct being evaluated. Construct validity is established through item analysis, including discrimination, difficulty, item-total correlation, and internal correlation matrices.

3.5 Reliability

Reliability is the consistency of data, scores, or observations from measurement instruments, including standardized examinations and research tasks (Tavakoli, 2012). Davies et al. (1999) define reliability as the degree to which measurement methods produce consistent results across a specific population under varying conditions. Reliability is essential for validity and confidence in the acceptance of a test's results. This study uses test-retest reliability and the Alpha-Cronbach formula to verify the reliability of research instruments.

3.5.1 Reliability of the LE Questionnaire

The researcher used a test-retest procedure to assess the reliability of a language ego questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to 50 students again after a 14-day interval, confirming its reliability. The Pearson correlation coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.93, indicating its reliability, as proposed by Shanley et al. (1971). Cronbach's Alpha formula, which assesses internal consistency, also evaluated the questionnaire's reliability

(Cohen et al., 2018). The alpha coefficient, calculated using the sample students' scores, was 0.91, indicating a positive indicator for the dependability coefficient. Both methods were used to evaluate the questionnaire's reliability.

3.5.2 Reliability of the Writing Test

The reliability of the test was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.91, indicating high internal consistency. This result confirms that the test components are reliable for assessing the intended writing skills.

4. Results

4.1 Results Related to First Aim

To determine Iraqi EFL students' level of language ego, a questionnaire was administered, and responses were statistically analyzed. The results show an arithmetic mean of 54.18 with a standard deviation of 7.75. A one-sample t-test comparing the meaning to the theoretical mean (48) revealed a statistically significant difference at 0.05 level, with a calculated t-value (14.918) exceeding the critical value (1.96, df = 349). This indicates that the sample possesses a relatively high level of language ego (Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1)

Table 4.1 The Arithmetic Mean, The Standard Deviation, and the t-value of the language ego Questionnaire

Variable	N.	Mean	Arithmetic Deviation	Standard Deviation	Theoretical Mean	t-value		Significance 0.05
						Critical	Calculated	
language ego	350	54.183	7.754	48	14.918	1.96		Significant

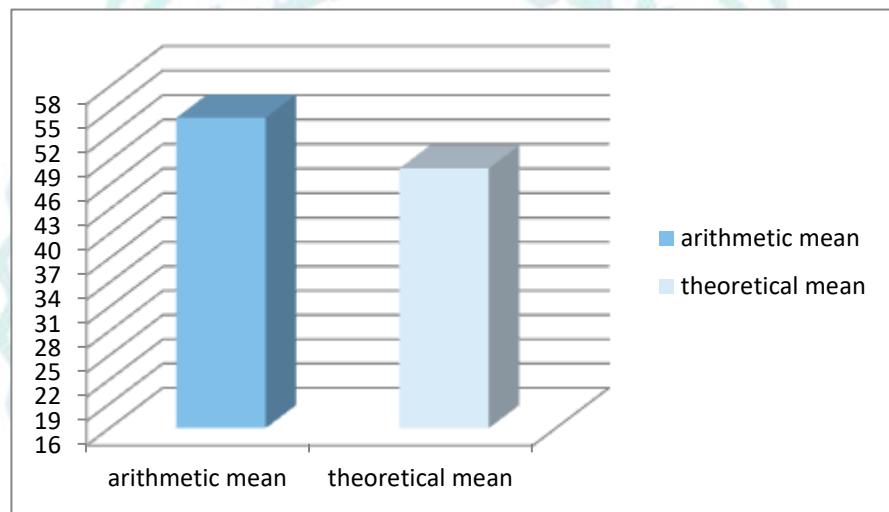


Figure 4.1

The Arithmetic and Theoretical Means of the language ego Questionnaire

4.2 Results Related to Second Aim

To assess Iraqi EFL university students' writing performance, the writing skill test is administered to the research sample. Participants' scores are statistically manipulated. The results show an arithmetic mean of 15.203 with a standard deviation of 2.647, compared to the theoretical mean of 15. A one-sample t-test revealed a calculated t-value of 1.434, which is lower than the

critical value (1.96) at the 0.05 significance level with 349 degrees of freedom. This indicates that the students' writing performance is at a moderate level. (See Table 4.2 and Figure 4.2)

Table (4.2)

Arithmetic Mean, Standard Deviation, and T-test Value of Speaking and Writing Skills, and productive skills

Variable	Sample	Mean	Standard	Theoretical	t-test values		significance (0.05)
					Computed	Critical	
writing	350	15.203	2.647	15	1.434	1.96	Insignificant

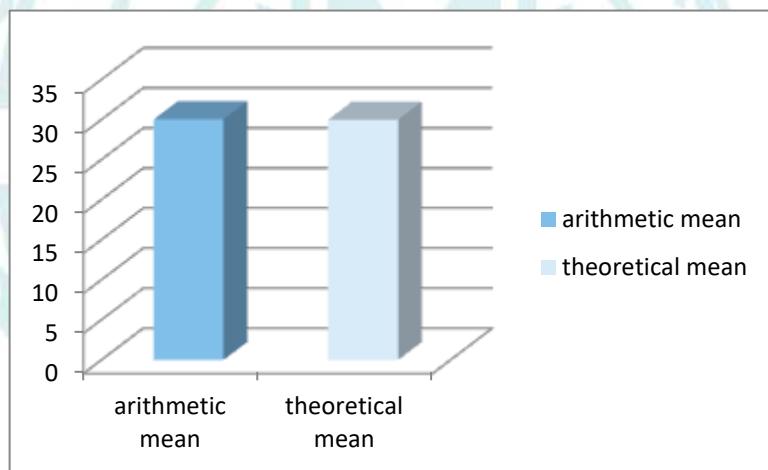


Figure 4.1

The arithmetic and theoretical means for the productive skills test

4.3 Results Related to the Third Aim

To examine the correlation between Iraqi EFL students' language ego and their writing performance, scores from the language ego questionnaire and the writing section of the test were analyzed using Pearson's correlation

coefficient. The results indicate a **positive correlation** between language ego and writing performance (see Table 4.3).

skill	N.	Correlation Coefficient	T-value		Significance Level (0.05)
			Critical	Calculated	
writing Skill	350	0.615	13.667	1.96	Significant

The results show that the correlation coefficient between language ego and writing skill is (0.508). T-test is used to find out the significance of the relationship. The results show that the calculated t-value is (11.289) which is higher than the critical t- test value (1.96) at a level of significant (0.05) and the degree of freedom (348). According to this result, there is a statistically significant positive relationship between writing skill and language ego; in other words, the more language ego control Iraqi university students possess, the better their writing skill.

5. Discussion of Results

The study investigates the relationship between language ego and writing performance in Iraqi EFL university students. The results show that students have a high level of language ego, as their mean score is higher than the theoretical average. This indicates a strong connection to English, which is influenced by digital platforms and media. Students are also inherently ready to engage with the language, as evaluated by self-perception, confidence, and motivation.

However, students demonstrate moderate writing performance despite having a high language ego. The t-test results show no significant difference between the sample's writing performance and the theoretical mean. A statistically significant positive correlation was found between language ego and writing performance, with a coefficient of 0.503. Writing may depend more on academic exposure, structured practice, and feedback mechanisms than internal emotional factors.

The study suggests that language ego is a meaningful predictor of writing performance. However, the moderate level of writing performance suggests external pedagogical and institutional factors may hinder students from fully developing an acceptable level of performance. One such factor is the predominant focus on grammatical and written accuracy in the Iraqi university context, where language instruction often emphasizes rule-based learning rather than communicative competence. Limited opportunities for authentic interaction in the classroom can restrain the development of fluency and coherent expression.

Moreover, the absence of consistent classroom activities that promote real-life communication in English, such as collaborative writing, may limit students' ability to apply their confidence in practice. The study's findings suggest a gap between internal motivation (language ego) and external language use opportunities, which may explain the average performance in writing.

6. Recommendation

- Incorporate classroom practices that build language ego, such as supportive feedback during writing activities.
- Adopt learner-centered approaches that nurture both confidence and fluency in writing.
- Focus more on communication-oriented writing tasks, as students' writing performance remained moderate despite good language ego.
- Include modules on affective factors such as language ego in teacher training programs.
- Provide structured opportunities for real-world writing practice, such as writing workshops and language exchange events.
- Balance the emphasis between accuracy and communicative effectiveness in EFL curriculum designs.
- Increase institutional investment to reduce barriers to writing practice, equip classrooms with interactive learning tools.
- Explore instructional models that combine language ego support with writing skill development for measurable improvements in student writing performance.

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