

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-PERCEIVED AND ACTUAL WRITING PROFICIENCY AMONG MOROCCAN HIGH SCHOOL EFL LEARNERS

JAMAL LABRADHI

Higher Institute of Management, Administration, and Computer Engineering
(ISMAGI), Rabat, Morocco

<https://doi.org/10.37602/IJSSMR.2026.9310>

ABSTRACT

The paper in hands investigates the relationship between Moroccan high school EFL learners' self-perceived and actual paragraph writing proficiency. Employing a quantitative correlational cross-sectional design, this study examined 50 high school students (aged 17-20) from two public high schools in Jorf El Melha. Data were collected through a 5-item Likert scale questionnaire measuring perceived writing ability across five dimensions (overall paragraph writing, grammar, mechanics, cohesion, and coherence) and a 60-minute paragraph writing task. The results revealed that participants perceived their writing abilities as below moderate ($M = 2.38-2.58$), while actual performance varied across the five dimensions. Spearman correlation analysis revealed positive correlations exist between self-perceptions and actual abilities in mechanics, cohesion, and coherence. Surprisingly, a strong negative correlation emerged for grammar. These findings highlight the need for integrating explicit metacognitive training and shifting from rule-based to functional grammar instruction in Moroccan EFL writing classroom in order to enhance both writing proficiency and self-assessment accuracy.

Keywords: self-perceived writing proficiency, actual writing proficiency, metacognitive awareness, self-efficacy, paragraph writing.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

It has become increasingly apparent that, among the four language skills, writing stands out as the most complex one. The complexity of this language skill is justified by the number of cognitive activities that writers are required to demonstrate in the process of writing (Nunan, 1989). By the same token, Kroll (2003) asserts that “writing is a complex process that involves the mastery of multiple skills that contribute to the overall difficulty of writing for any language user”. As Hyland (2003) argues, EFL learners require not only realistic strategies for drafting and revising, but also a clear understanding of genre to structure their writing experiences. This multifaceted nature of writing makes it challenging for EFL learners to come up with accurate and well-organized pieces of writing.

Beyond linguistic knowledge and genre awareness, metacognitive processes also play a fundamental role in the development of EFL writing skills. The concept of metacognition was first shaped and coined by Flavell in 1978, who defines it as “the part of one’s acquired world knowledge that has to do with cognitive matters” (Flavell, 1978, p. 21). In other word, metacognition refers to individuals' awareness and understanding of their own cognitive processes and abilities (Farahian, 2017, p. 736). In the context of EFL writing, the way in which

EFL learners perceive their writing strengths and weaknesses plays a crucial role in identifying areas requiring improvement. When learners possess accurate metacognitive awareness, they set realistic objectives and engage in meaningful self-directed improvement.

Building on the concept of metacognition, Bandura's (1977, 1997) social cognitive theory introduces self-efficacy as a key indicator of academic performance. This concept refers to learners' beliefs in their ability to successfully perform specific tasks, and these beliefs significantly influence their behaviors, choices, motivation, and perseverance (Bandura, 1997). In the context of paragraph writing, self-efficacy has been proven to be a significant factor which impacts EFL learners' writing performance and development (Pajares & Johnson, 1994). Learners with higher paragraph writing self-efficacy demonstrate greater willingness to engage in writing activities, invest more effort in the writing process, and persist longer when encountering challenges (Bruning & Kauffman, 2016). In addition, writing self-efficacy beliefs help learners as well as instructors to predict writing proficiency and achievement more accurately than general academic self-efficacy (Pajares, 2003).

Despite the well-established theoretical significance of metacognitive awareness and self-efficacy in writing development, very limited empirical research has embarked on the relationship between EFL learners' self-perceived and actual writing abilities in the Moroccan EFL context. While existing studies have explored Moroccan high school students' writing challenges from linguistic and pedagogical perspectives (Meziani, 1984; El Ghouati et al., 2018; Aknouch & Bouthiche, 2022; Lahoual et al., 2025), the extent to which these learners can accurately assess their own writing proficiency remains underexplored. Therefore, the paper in hand addresses this gap by investigating Moroccan high school EFL learners' perceptions of their paragraph writing skills, assessing their actual writing proficiency, and examining the correlation between self-perceived and actual abilities across multiple dimensions of paragraph writing.

1.1 Significance of the study

Besides enriching the Moroccan academia and contributing to the ongoing discussion on the English Language Teaching (ELT) in the Moroccan context, the findings of the present paper speak directly to writing instructors, EFL teachers, and curriculum designers in the Moroccan ELT landscape. On the one hand, if lower-proficiency learners overestimate their writing skills abilities, this paper calls for the integration of metacognitive awareness training, such as explicit instruction in self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and peer assessment, into the writing curriculum. On the other hand, it invites them to target confidence-building and writing self-efficacy if higher-proficiency learners are found to underestimate their competences. In either case, the study provides an empirically grounded basis for reforming how writing self-assessment is conceptualized and implemented in the Moroccan EFL context.

1.2 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of Moroccan EFL learners' self-perceived writing ability across the dimensions of overall writing ability, grammar, mechanics, cohesion, and coherence?

2. What level of actual writing proficiency do Moroccan EFL learners demonstrate on an analytic rubric-based writing test?
3. Is there a statistically significant correlation between Moroccan EFL learners' self-perceived writing ability and their actual writing proficiency?

1.3 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guide the inferential analyses:

H₁: Moroccan EFL learners will perceive their writing skills as being at a moderate level across the five dimensions of overall writing ability, grammar, mechanics, cohesion, and coherence.

H₂: Moroccan EFL learners' actual writing proficiency will fall within the intermediate proficiency range.

H₃: There is a statistically significant positive correlation between Moroccan EFL learners' perceived writing ability and their actual writing proficiency.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative correlational cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between Moroccan EFL learners' self-perceived writing skills and their actual writing proficiency. The sample of this study consisted of 50 high school students aged 17-20 years old enrolled in both scientific and literary streams at two different public high schools in Jorf El Melha, selected through convenience sampling. A 5-item self-assessment 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was developed to measure participants' perceptions of their writing ability across five dimensions: overall paragraph writing abilities, grammar, mechanics, cohesion, and coherence. Following the questionnaire, the participants completed a 60-min paragraph writing task to examine their actual paragraph writing abilities. Their writing skills and subskills were evaluated by an experienced teacher and graded out of 5 to facilitate data analysis.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Participants' Self-Perceived Writing Proficiency

Table 1: Participants' Perceptions of their Paragraph Writing Proficiency.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I find writing as an easy task	50	1	5	2,48	1,313
I find it easy to write down my ideas in accurate sentences	50	1	5	2,38	1,244
I find it easy to use mechanics appropriately	50	1	5	2,52	1,282
I find it easy to connect my sentences to come up with a piece of writing	50	1	5	2,58	1,311

I find it easy to move from one idea to another	50	1	5	2,52	1,297
Valid N (listwise)	50				

Table 1 presents participants' self-reported perceptions of their paragraph writing proficiency. The mean scores for the five items range from 2.38 to 2.58, all of which fall below the midpoint (3.0) of the 5-point Likert scale. These values suggest that participants generally perceive their writing abilities as below moderate, indicating perceived difficulties across various aspects of writing. Specifically, participants reported challenges in expressing ideas accurately in sentences (M = 2.38, SD = 1.244), using mechanics appropriately (M = 2.52, SD = 1.282), connecting sentences coherently (M = 2.58, SD = 1.311), transitioning between ideas (M = 2.52, SD = 1.297), and viewing writing as an easy task overall (M = 2.48, SD = 1.313).

The standard deviations, ranging from 1.244 to 1.313, indicate some sort of moderate diversity in participants' responses. This suggests that while the majority of participants perceive writing as challenging, there is some heterogeneity within the sample, with certain individuals expressing greater confidence in their writing abilities than others. Overall, these findings support the hypothesis that Moroccan EFL learners perceive their writing skills as being at a below-moderate level across multiple dimensions of paragraph writing proficiency.

The hypothesis that Moroccan EFL learners would perceive their writing skills as being at a moderate level was rejected. Results from Table 1 demonstrated mean scores ranging from 2.38 to 2.58. All these scores fall below the midpoint of 3.0, which indicates that the informants perceived their writing abilities as below moderate rather than moderate. This finding differs from others in other EFL contexts, where EFL learners expressed moderate confidence in their writing abilities (Teng, 2019; Rahimi & Fathi, 2022; Teng & Wang, 2023; Zhang & Zhang, 2025). These low self-perceptions among Moroccan learners may reflect the challenges documented in previous studies regarding writing instruction and learner autonomy in the Moroccan context (Aknouch & Bouthiche, 2022).

3.2 Participants Actual Writing Performance Across Five Dimensions

Table 2: Participants' Actual Writing Performance Across Five Dimensions.

	Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Overall paragraph writing ability	50	1,00	4,50	2,7700	1,06047
Grammar	50	1,00	5,00	3,2200	1,11648
Mechanics	50	1,00	4,50	2,8200	1,07741
Cohesion	50	1,00	4,00	2,0400	,83201
Coherence	50	1,50	4,50	3,5600	,78662
Valid N (listwise)	50				

The table above presents participants' actual writing performance. The mean scores across the five dimensions range from 2.04 to 3.56, which indicates diverse levels of proficiency in different aspects of paragraph writing. Coherence stands out as the strongest dimension (M = 3.56, SD = 0.787). This means that participants were relatively successful in maintaining logical flow and unity of ideas throughout their paragraphs. Grammar also demonstrated above-moderate performance (M = 3.22, SD = 1.116). This reveals that participants possessed reasonable control over sentence structures and grammatical accuracy. In contrast, cohesion was identified as the weakest dimension (M = 2.04, SD = 0.832), revealing significant challenges in using cohesive devices and linking mechanisms to connect ideas within and across sentences. Overall paragraph writing ability (M = 2.77, SD = 1.060) and mechanics (M = 2.82, SD = 1.077) both fell slightly below the midpoint, indicating below-moderate proficiency in these areas.

The standard deviations, ranging from 0.787 to 1.116, suggest moderate variability in performance across dimensions. The relatively lower standard deviation for cohesion (SD = 0.832) and coherence (SD = 0.787) indicates more consistent performance among participants in these areas, while the higher standard deviation for grammar (SD = 1.116) reflects greater heterogeneity, with some students demonstrating strong grammatical competence and others struggling considerably. Overall, these findings reveal that Moroccan EFL learners demonstrate below-moderate to moderate actual writing proficiency, with notable strengths in coherence and grammar but considerable weaknesses in cohesion.

The hypothesis that Moroccan EFL learners' actual paragraph writing proficiency would fall within the intermediate range was partially supported. While overall writing ability (M = 2.77) and mechanics (M = 2.82) fell slightly below moderate levels, grammar (M = 3.22) and particularly coherence (M = 3.56) demonstrated intermediate to above-intermediate proficiency. It was also revealed that cohesion is the weakest dimension (M = 2.04), indicating below-moderate performance. These results align with findings from El Ghouati et al. (2018) and Lahoual et al. (2025), who found that Moroccan EFL learners encounter serious challenges in writing sub-skills.

3.3 Correlation Analysis: Self-Perception vs. Actual Performance

Table 3: Spearman Correlation Coefficients Between Actual Writing Proficiency and Self-Perceived Writing Abilities

		Self-perceived				
		Attitude towards grammar	Attitude towards mechanics	Attitude towards cohesion	Attitude towards coherence	
Actual proficiency	Overall	Correlation Coefficient	-,775**	,662**	,662**	,660**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000
		N	50	50	50	50
	Mechanic	Correlation Coefficient	-,752**	,671**	,671**	,664**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000
		N	50	50	50	50

	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	50	50	50	50
Cohesion	Correlation Coefficient	-,563**	,489**	,489**	,481**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	50	50	50	50
Coherence	Correlation Coefficient	-,677**	,552**	,552**	,569**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	50	50	50	50

Table 3 presents Spearman correlation coefficients examining the relationship between participants' actual writing proficiency (across five dimensions) and their self-perceived abilities (across five attitudinal dimensions). The findings unveiled positive correlations between actual proficiency and self-perceived abilities in mechanics, cohesion, and coherence. These correlations ranged from moderate to strong ($r = .481$ to $.671$, all $p < .001$). This means that students who performed better in actual writing tasks also tended to rate themselves higher in these specific dimensions. Surprisingly, a significant negative correlation emerged between self-perceived and actual abilities in grammar. This relationship indicates that participants who demonstrated higher actual writing proficiency reported lower confidence in grammar; whilst, those with lower actual proficiency expressed greater confidence in this dimension.

This negative correlation suggests a potential metacognitive paradox. On the one hand, more proficient learners are aware of the grammatical complexity; therefore, they are more cautious of their grammar abilities. On the other hand, less proficient writers lack sufficient metacognitive awareness to accurately recognize their grammatical limitations. These results are consistent with the Dunning-Kruger effect, where lower performing learners tend to overestimate their competence; whilst, higher performing ones demonstrate greater critical awareness of grammatical complexity.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This study examined how Moroccan high school EFL learners view their paragraph writing skills compared to their actual abilities in five areas: overall paragraph writing ability, grammar, mechanics, cohesion, and coherence. The findings show that students generally considered themselves as weak writers. Indeed, the participants' self-perceptions matched their actual performance in mechanics, cohesion, and coherence. However, it was found that informants who wrote better felt less confident about their grammar skills, while weaker writers were overly confident. This suggests that better writers understand how complex grammar really is and are more careful in judging themselves, whereas weaker writers may confuse memorizing grammar rules with actually being able to use grammar correctly.

These findings highlight the need to include metacognitive training in Moroccan EFL writing classes. Teachers should help students develop better self-monitoring skills through guided self-assessment activities and peer evaluation exercises so they can more accurately judge their own writing abilities. For EFL learners who underestimate themselves, confidence-building activities can help align their perceptions with their actual performance. Future research should

track how students' self-assessment accuracy changes over time, test whether metacognitive training improves self-assessment skills, and examine whether this grammar confidence problem exists in other EFL settings or is specific to traditional, rule-focused teaching environments. By addressing metacognitive awareness alongside writing skills, educators can help students not only write better but also develop the self-awareness needed for continued, independent improvement in EFL writing.

REFERENCES

1. Aknouch, L., & Bouthiche, H. (2022). Types and sources of Moroccan EFL students' errors in writing: A study of error analysis. *Arab World English Journal*, 13(4), 67-79. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol13no4.5>
2. Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191-215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191>
3. Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W.H. Freeman.
4. Bruning, R. H., & Kauffman, D. F. (2016). Self-efficacy beliefs and motivation in writing development. In C. A. MacArthur, S. Graham, & J. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Handbook of writing research* (2nd ed., pp. 160-173). The Guilford Press.
5. El Ghouati, A., & Koumachi, B. (2018). Scholastic Achievement and Computer Attitudes among Moroccan University Students. *Arab World English Journal*, 9 (1). DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol9no1.3>
6. Farahian, M., Avarzamani, F. Metacognitive awareness of skilled and less-skilled EFL writers. *Asian. J. Second. Foreign. Lang. Educ.* 3, 10 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-018-0052-4>
7. Flavell, J. H. (1978). Metacognitive development. In J. M. Scandura & C. J. Brainerd (Eds.), *Structural/process theories of complex human behavior* (pp. 213-245). Sijthoff & Noordhoff.
8. Hyland, K. (2003). *Second language writing*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667251>
9. Kroll, B. (2003). *Exploring the dynamics of second language writing*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511615160>
10. Lahoual, M., Yassine, R., Ben Mhamed, M., & Hdouch, Y. (2025). Empowering grammatical accuracy in Moroccan EFL writing: The impact of ChatGPT. *American Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research*, 9(5), 202-210. <https://www.ajhssr.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/V25905202210.pdf>
11. Meziani, A. (1984). Moroccan learners' English errors: A pilot study. *Attadriss*, 7, 57-71.
12. Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom*. Cambridge University Press.
13. Pajares, F. (2003). Self-efficacy beliefs, motivation, and achievement in writing: A review of the literature. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 19(2), 139-158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10573560308222>
14. Pajares, F., & Johnson, M. J. (1994). Confidence and competence in writing: The role of self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, and apprehension. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 28(3), 313-331.
15. Rahimi, M., & Fathi, J. (2022). Exploring the impact of wiki-mediated collaborative writing on EFL students' writing performance, writing self-regulation, and writing self-

- efficacy: A mixed methods study. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 35(9), 2389-2418. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2021.1888753>
16. Teng, M. F. (2019). The benefits of metacognitive reading strategy awareness instruction for young learners of English as a second language. *Literacy*, 54(1), 29-39. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lit.12181>
 17. Teng, M. F., & Wang, C. (2023). Assessing academic writing self-efficacy belief and writing performance in a foreign language context. *Foreign Language Annals*, 56(1), 144-169. <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12638>
 18. Zhang, J., & Zhang, L. J. (2025). Exploring the profiles of foreign language learners' writing self-regulation: Focusing on individual differences. *Reading and Writing*, 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-024-10568-x>