

## The Self Efficacy of Gifted Children on Creative Writing

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**Abstract.** The intent of the study is to examine the writing self – efficacy of gifted second language learners in a private school in Istanbul, Turkey. It also presents the similarities and differences in teachers' and gifted learners' belief of writing self – efficacy. The data showed that self – efficacy requires many experiences with well selected activities in an appropriate environment. Creative writing is one of the best activities to provide the right environment. Besides it can increase the development in creativity.

*\* I wish to thank my dear mother for her great support.*

### Introduction

Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave (Bandura, 1994). According to Bandura (1994), a person who has a strong sense of efficacy can develop himself or herself in many ways whereas someone who doubts his or her capabilities shy away from difficult tasks which they view as personal threats. They have low aspirations and weak commitment to the goals they choose to pursue. When faced with difficult tasks, they dwell on their personal deficiencies, on the obstacles they will encounter, and all kinds of adverse outcomes rather than concentrate on how to perform successfully.

On the website of Rhode Island State Advisory Committee on Gifted and Talented Education the base for a state wide network of communication, resource and advocacy for children, parents and educators interested in gifted and talented education are provided. Here it is stated that ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children (1985) cites three types of characteristics of gifted children: general behavioral, learning, and creative characteristics. (ri.net, 2005)

What it is going to be dealt in the present study is about self – efficacy on creative writing. Therefore having an idea about the creative abilities of gifted children would help a lot. Gifted children's creative abilities often set them apart from their age-mates. These characteristics may take the following forms:

- Gifted children are fluent thinkers, able to generate possibilities, consequences, or related ideas.
- They are flexible thinkers, able to use many different alternatives and approaches to problem solving.

- They are original thinkers, seeking new, unusual, or unconventional associations and combinations among items of information.
- They can also see relationships among seemingly unrelated objects, ideas, or facts.
- They are elaborate thinkers, producing new steps, ideas, responses, or other embellishments to a basic idea, situation, or problems.
- They are willing to entertain complexity and seem to thrive on problem solving.
- They are good guessers and can readily construct hypotheses or "what if" questions.
- They often are aware of their own impulsiveness and irrationality, and they show emotional sensitivity.
- They are extremely curious about objects, ideas, situations, or events.
- They often display intellectual playfulness and like to fantasize and imagine.
- They can be less intellectually inhibited than their peers are in expressing opinions and ideas, and they often disagree spiritedly with others' statements.
- They are sensitive to beauty and are attracted to aesthetic values.

Gifted language learners need to demonstrate their highest level of abilities. As being gifted they may easily overcome any grammatical instruction. They should be provided appropriate environment in which they can develop talents. What can be done is so clear. Giving them the opportunity to use as much as English they can. Speaking and Writing activities seem to be great for that. Creative writing programmes can increase self – efficacy because through them learners can easily and clearly focus on the development of self.

There have been many researches on writing self – efficacy. Chandler (1999) conducted a study to enhance self – esteem and self – efficacy in adolescents through a creative writing program. The purpose of this study was to describe the rationale, content and results of a group creative writing program to increase adolescent self – esteem and self – efficacy. The participants were 11<sup>th</sup> grade English learners (3 boys and 8 girls). Free writing in response to specific exercises, sharing their own stories in their own language, and responding to their peers were used daily for two weeks as part of the high school English class. By this study they had the opportunity to tell their own story, in their own language in a safe, structured setting with positive feedback and that led them to higher self – efficacy and self – esteem.

The age factor seems to be a neutral one because in a study in which young children participated the results seemed to be similar. Kim and Lorschach (2005) aimed to examine young children's perceptions of writing self – efficacy (Grades K – 1). The research showed that children are affected by personal perceived self – efficacy. Therefore, self – efficacy can affect young learners as well.

Magogwe and Oliver (2007) stated that the outcomes of their study are important for a country where the learning of English is an important educational requirement. In their research, the relationship between preferred language strategies, age, proficiency, and self – efficacy beliefs was explored. They collected data from 480 students from primary schools, secondary schools and a tertiary institution between 2002 and 2005. Students were given questionnaires. The results indicated that students use language learning strategies. Their self – efficacy was also ascertained. According to the results, good students generally scored the highest mean followed by fair students and then poor students.

With these perceptions in mind the researcher intended to ask the research questions below:

- How does writing self – efficacy affect the gifted second language learners?
- Are there any similarities or differences in teachers' and gifted learners' belief of writing self - efficacy?

## Participants

Gifted children need a special environment and they should also be supported according to their competences and talents. Therefore their school should have a unique educational environment, offering them the opportunity to develop their talents in order to become future leaders in society.

The researcher visited a school which seems to be supplying most of the needs stated above. It is in Istanbul in Turkey for gifted children. It is situated on a 416-hectare land surrounded with trees some of which were planted by the students. The students are also involved in greenhouse activity. There are outdoor sport fields, indoor sport centers, Music and Art rooms in the campus. The administration is in another building where the school principal's and vice principal's offices are situated. The school also involves a health center with a school doctor and a nurse. When necessary the school gets medical help from affiliated hospitals and health centers. The school aims to:

- develop each student's special gifts and talents, recognizing their individual strengths.
- provide learning opportunities that will offer each student the education they need to enable them to contribute meaningfully in a world undergoing constant change and development
- prepare students for their future roles as leaders in their society.
- encourage them to think globally, and act locally by sharing their talents within the community and beyond.

There are 206 students from 44 cities of Turkey. 94 of them are female and 112 are male. 47 of 237 graduates of the school are studying at prestigious universities abroad and the rest are in Turkey on full scholarship.

The lessons take place in two blocks which consists of 12 classrooms. Each classroom holds around 15 students. All the students are boarder. Some students have full, some have partial scholarship. The students are selected by a special evaluation test. They are educated by Turkish and foreign teachers. The school implements the curriculum of the Ministry of Education. In addition to that, the programme of International Bacheloria is adhibited.

The school takes 5 years. The first year is preparatory in which the students learn English as a second language. There are 4 preparatory classes. There are two groups of classes as streaming. Class A and B are upper whereas Class C and D are lower classes. The upper classes have 20 hours of English. 6 of them are Grammar, 6 are Reading, 6 are Writing and 2 are Listening. The lower classes have 22 hours of English. The hours of Reading, Writing and Listening lessons are equal to upper classes whereas the Grammar lessons take 8 hours. All the students read original novels in the Reading lessons.

The researcher conducted the study in one of the upper classes chosen as randomly. There are 14 participants in the study. 10 of them are male and 4 of them are female. 8 of the students are 15 years old. 4 of them are 14 years old. One of them is 16 years old and one of them stated that his age is 14 or 15 because this can change according to the point of view. It is the first year of all students since it is their preparatory to learn English. The parents of 10 students are university graduates. 3 participants mentioned that their mothers are housewives and one of the participants stated that his father is retired but he did not mention his job. This shows that the participants were from high socio – economic backgrounds. 6 participants are an only child. One of them has 2 siblings whereas the rest have 1 sibling.

The participants have 3 different teachers whereas the other classes have 4 different teachers. All the teachers of this class are native speakers.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Before starting the study, the researcher interviewed the head of Foreign Languages Department to get some general information about the school, education of English and the teachers. During the interview process, the researcher was aware of the importance of the English lessons at school. It was more than learning how to speak and write. Encouraging students to make their own comments and interpretations through literature and reading lessons full of creative and racy activities was the core aim.

Three English teachers of this class were given a questionnaire which consisted of 19 items. It contained questions dealing with the self – efficacy beliefs about teaching English. The teachers read the questions and chose one of the five options that best described the level of their agreement with each statement.

The researcher visited the class during two Writing lessons. That took approximately 80 minutes. After giving handouts to the students, instructions were given for a creative writing activity called ‘Jumble Story’ (Gardner, 1999). The aim of the activity was to create a story. Therefore 4 groups of items were given. The headings of these groups were “character”, “setting”, “situation” and “time”. Under each heading ten different options were given. What the students did was to choose one from each and write about these.

The researcher also collected some of the prior writing activities of the students from the Writing teacher. The Writing teacher was asked especially to provide the creative ones to compare them with the one given for the study.

When they finish the activity, the students were given a questionnaire with 16 items. They chose one of the six options that best describes their best judgment about their level of proficiency in English skills. Next they completed a form to evaluate the writing activity. Both the questionnaire and the evaluation form were in Turkish which is the mother tongue of the students. Then they were translated into English. In the end, the students were wanted to evaluate the writing activity orally, too. Data gathered from this oral evaluation were recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed by the researcher.

Both of the questionnaires used in this study took place in the method of data collection in a survey (Chacón, 2002) conducted primarily on Venezuelan middle school teachers to explore the nature of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher self – efficacy beliefs in the middle schools in San Cristobal, Venezuela.

## The Results

As it is displayed in Table 1 the result of the questionnaires showed the exact difference between “agree” and “disagree” items. That indicates both teachers’ and learners’ self – efficacy is high.

Table 1. The Results of the questionnaires

		Agree	Disagree
Self – efficacy beliefs	Teacher version	36	16
Self - reported proficiency	Student version	147	16

According to the results of the teachers' questionnaires, all of the teachers agree that they know the necessary strategies to teach the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) effectively. Two of the teachers believe that students' achievement in English is directly related to their teacher's effectiveness in English teaching so they chose the agree option for this statement. The other teacher stated that he didn't agree on this.

The analysis of the participants showed that 7 students found the study "Good" and the other 7 students mentioned that it was "Not Bad".

Some of the students 3 out of 14 students thought that the time was limited and this affected their writing negatively. 2 students commented as below:

Before I start to write, I did not plan anything about the setting of the story. I did not give any details because of the time limitation so it may be difficult for the reader to relate between the events.

I did not care for my punctuation and grammar mistakes. I cannot say that I created a work of art because I made it up during the process of writing. I don't think I wrote a striking ending because of the limited time.

4 out of 14 students mentioned that the writing activity was similar with the ones they did before:

The activity was not bad. We had a couple of similar activities before but they were usually more difficult. I do not know how good or bad I have written but I think this activity was neither good nor bad.

It looked like our prior activities but we were deciding about characters, settings and so on. They were usually group work activities. I must say that they were more enjoyable than this activity. In contrast to the ordinary activities, this was much better.

It was a good activity. It was like the ones we did at the beginning of the academic year. It was really enjoyable.

For some students (4 out of 14) that this activity was not boring whereas one of them mentioned that it was a boring activity. Another point the students mentioned was about the limitation of creativity. 4 students wrote that this activity limited their creativity because it was a bit guided. Above all, 3 of the students stated that the activity did not limit their creativity:

Although it was not very different from the prior activities, it was not boring. In the previous activities we were creating the characters, setting and everything on our own so we made a big progress to use our creativity.

The activity is totally boring because it limits our creativity because writing on specific topics on our own is easier. It's needless to say but dislike of writing may have caused this.

I like this activity the most because it provides us an opportunity to use the ability of creativity. Thanks to the topics and items on the handout. It helped us to choose the best for ourselves.

When the prior activities of the students were compared with "Jumble Story" activity, it was seen that there was a huge gap. As an early study, the prior one contained more errors. It even contained

grammar mistakes whereas the “Jumble Story” activity mostly contained errors in strategy competence or sociolinguistics competence.

Their creativity seemed to be broadened. As they mentioned in the open – ended questions on the evaluation forms, they kept on having similar kind of activities throughout the year. The adjectives and usage of colloquial English also attracted the researcher’s attention. Their teachers stated that the original novels they read seemed to be very helpful.

The students also mentioned that interpreting about their own texts causes them to develop their self-efficacy. They added that they used to write without thinking about their development in writing, at the beginning of the year, but now they do.

## Conclusion

The biggest shortcoming of the study was about the time. As some of the students stated, 40 minutes was a limited time to write a jumble story. Giving the students only one activity caused the researcher to have some difficulties during the process of data analysis.

It is important to point out that the study is a small scale one. The number of the students is very small. Conducting the study on more gifted children could be better.

The teachers attended the study were all native speakers so this may have affected their replies on the questionnaire. Because the language they are teaching is their mother tongue, they may have had higher self – efficacy and higher confidence.

It is clear that having self efficacy play a big role to develop oneself. It is believed that people can develop their beliefs on their efficacy. Being aware of oneself would help a lot and this is only possible by developing self – efficacy which is needed a lot in language teaching. Creating the atmosphere in which students can gain a strong sense of efficacy would help a lot. Although gifted children are so creative, they should still be supported.

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