L2 Learning Motivation and Self-Assessment Among EFL Learners Regarding Their Writing Skill

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Abstract: In this correlational study, 54 MA students were selected out of 68 initial participants majoring in TEFL at Khatam ol-Anbia University, Tehran, Iran. The homogeneity of participants was calculated through administration The Cambridge Proficiency Test. Then, participants took a motivation test. After that, a topic was given to them to write an essay. All important parts of essay including thesis statement, body paragraphs, conclusion, outlining, and coherence was already taught to the participants. In addition, they were asked to read their own writing and score based on Writing Scoring Rubric modified. In order to avoid subjective rating and ensure the intra- rater reliability of the assessment, these writing samples were scored twice based on the same scale that the students utilized in self-assessment. The results revealed that there was not statistically significant relationship between motivation and students` self-assessment. Moreover, the relationship between self-assessment and teacher's rating of students` writing ability was statistically significant. The findings have some implications for language teaching and assessment.
Keywords: Motivation, assessment, essay writing, and self-assessment

INTRODUCTION

Teachers from All over the world try making students motivated and helping them to have positive feelings towards the target language. To do so, they work on all four skills, i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking.

The importance of writing skill is increasing in consequence of the increasing interest of students to study abroad. Writing is one of the skills which students try to get a good mark in. It is generally acknowledged that in order to assess the students' performances we need to use a variety of assessment methods [1]. Yet, in traditional classrooms, which are predominant in Iran, the teacher is the only evaluator. Such evaluation is acceptable in case of tests whose items have one correct answer, but in performance tests, such as writing, the evaluation is not straight- forward. In order to compensate for the limitations of teacher-assessment, alternative assessment including self-assessment has been the focus of attention [1].

In this modern view of assessment, learners are trained to assess their own learning progress, and identify their own strengths and weaknesses. There might be some personal factors that are in direct relation to writing ability. Being assessed is an emotional business and being judged about the quality of one's work is potentially humiliating experience [2]. Performance of language tests is affected by attributes of individuals such as age, gender, cultural background, cognitive abilities and affective schema [3]. In addition, motivation is considered as a key feature in the success of language learning. In fact, as Dörnyei [1] puts "motivation provides the primary impetus embark upon learning, and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process" (p.425). With regard to the important role of self-assessment in motivation, McMillan and Hearn [4] entitled their paper "Student self-assessment: The key to stronger student motivation and higher achievement" (p.40).

However the link between emotional factors such as motivation and self-assessment has received scant empirical attention, There is room to work on all individual factors yet. The researcher is interested in studying motivation as a probable factor related to writing ability of EFL learners. The intent of the present study is to see if there is any relationship between motivation and self-assessment in writing ability.

Statement of the problem

Writing is very important in education today so everyone wants to be good at it. The ability to write effectively is becoming more and more important and

writing instruction is assuming an increasing role in L2 language education. Unfortunately, most students get into difficulties in writing a well-made coherent sentence even after passing writing courses at universities and the grades they get in the norm-referenced assessment culture do not have accountability.

Based on these grades, teachers cannot provide evidence that the intended learning outcomes have been achieved [5]. It is generally believed that in order to assess student's performances, it is required to use different kinds of assessment methods. Yet, in traditional classrooms, which are prevalent in Iran, the teacher is the only evaluator. In writing whose items have no concrete correct answers, relying just on teacher's evaluation is not acceptable [1]. Alternative assessment like self-assessment has been the focus of attention to balance the limitations of teacher-assessment. In this kind of assessment, students are trained to assess their own work and realize the weakness and strength of their performance.

Administration of assessment of writing ability is a time-consuming and laborious process. To ease this problem, it's necessary to have a movement from bureaucratic to democratic assessment. To overcome the limitations of traditional standardized type of assessment, self-assessment has emerged in the field of language education. As far as the researcher knows there was no attempt to investigate and compare the relationship of motivation and self-assessment in writing ability. This study aims to bridge this gap. Thus, it aimed at investigating the relationship between motivation and EFL students" self-assessment in writing ability.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between motivation and self-assessment of writing ability and also to see if there is any significance difference between the marks which students will give to their own writing and the raters' marks.

Significance of the Study

The ability to write effectively is becoming more and more important and writing instruction is assuming an increasing role in L2 language education [5]. Correspondingly, testing the construct of writing is equally becoming the concern of experts in the field. Assessment is an integral part of learning. For teachers, assessment is a process of gathering data about students learning and informs them about their teaching. On the other hand, for students, assessment is a process which informs them about their learning.

According to Birjandi and Hadidi [6], by teaching self-assessment, learners are encouraged to look at course content more carefully and also learning self-assessment develops students' evaluation abilities toward what and how they learn. Plus, by practicing self-assessing, students could be motivated to focus more on learning than on grades [7]. Brown & Hudson [8] categorize self-assessment to three types, including: performance self-assessment, comprehension self-assessment and observation self-assessment.

In performance self-assessment, students read a situation and decide how well they would respond in it. In comprehension self-assessment, students read a situation and decide how well they would comprehend it. In contrast, in observation self-assessment, students listen to audio- or video tape recordings of their own language performance and decide how well they think they performed. In traditional assessment, students are given numerical grades for their writing which might not accurately indicate their writing and also teachers couldn't be in a position to judge the development of student's writing ability accurately. So, using self-assessment can be a good alternative to teacher-assessment.

Alternative assessment is liable to different individual factors like motivation which is the focus of the present study. Jafarpour [9] has pointed out that increasing the responsibility of the learner on EFL study programs necessitates the adjustment of testing procedures. Since independent learning is a very important part of language learning, self-assessment as an alternative method of assessment seems to be an aspect of assessment that warrants considerable future attention. Some problems associated with the traditional tests are:

- Traditionally, individualism and competitiveness is practiced. Collocation and cooperation is deemphasized.
- Assessment exercises power and control over students. Students learn first to distrust their own judgments and then act as agents to constrain themselves in judging their own knowledge of the language.
- There is a mismatch between what and how something is taught and what and how it is assessed. In the other words, teachers use the modern approaches to learning in which process of learning are emphasized but in assessing the learning abilities the focus is on the product rather than process.
- Assessment exerts a backwash effect on learning. Rote memorization and not deep understanding is emphasized. This is contradictory to the actual underlying beliefs of teachers practicing in the framework of the current learning approaches. - While teachers

wish their students to become knowledgeable about the entire course, learners are mostly interested in knowing the part taught is going to be included in the test or not. This focus on the elements of the curriculum is what the traditional and formal tests emphasize on [10].

- Students rely on their teachers' judgment of their language achievement and proficiency. The result is that they do not know what their strengths and weaknesses are; thus, they cannot map their knowledge of language at various points within a course or semester and become autonomous in their learning [11].
- Learning is not a motivating, self-regulatory activity in which self-correction and criticism faculties are developed.
- Autonomy and self-directed learning are not promoted. Learning language usually stops when formal classroom situation ends [12].

It seems that some of the problems mentioned above in statement of the problem may be partly solved if some forms of alternative assessment are brought into our practice. In this regard self-assessment and peer assessments seems to be two of the most fit and accessible ways of assessing the learning especially in low stakes situations. The advantages of self-assessment, on the hand [13]:

- It is highly motivating.
- It promotes learning
- Students participate in their own evaluation [14], sharing the burden of the assessment with the teacher.
- It gives a raised level of awareness of perceived levels of language abilities both to the learner and teacher.
- Range of assessment techniques is expanded in the classroom through the use of self-assessment methodologies.
- By involving learners as well as teachers acknowledge assessment as a mutual responsibility, and not as the sole responsibility of the teacher [10, 15, 16].
- Learner autonomy is promoted [17].

On the other hand, motivation is considered as a key feature in the success of language learning. Dörnyei believes that motivation is one of the most important abstractions in psychology and language teaching, generally used to explain learners' success and failure in learning process [1, 6]. Student motivation is a must for autonomy and promoting learning. This is especially important when we talk about mature students or students from non-traditional backgrounds [18].

It is believed that motivated students are more leaned toward self-evaluating by involving themselves in their own performances. Self-assessment process can benefit faculty by saving them time (for self-assessments are not graded), and it can benefit students as well. Through self-assessment, students improve editing, writing, and critical thinking skills. The main purpose of the present study, therefore, has been to investigate whether motivation as a personality factor influences students'' self-assessment in their writing ability.

Research Questions

Different goals could be considered in doing this research; however, different experts studied other sides and aspects of this view in different topics, but the purpose of the study can be as follows:

- Is there any significant relationship between students` motivation and their self-assessment in writing ability?
- Is there any significant relationship between students` self-assessment of writing ability and teacher`s rating?

Research Hypotheses

Due to the concern of the students` self-assessment in EFL writing, the following null hypotheses are set forth in order to investigate the research question posed above.

- There is no relationship between students` motivation and their self-assessment in writing ability.
- There is no relationship between students` self-assessment of writing ability and teacher's rating.

METHODOLOGY
Participants

The participants of the study were English majoring students of Khatam ol-Anbia University. This study started with 68 participants. Those students whose scores fell within the range of one plus or one minus standard deviation were chosen as the participants of the study. The number of participants who met the requirement turned out to be 54 students. They all passed general courses concerning reading comprehension, conversation, grammar, essay writing, and advanced writing when they were undergraduate students. They have also passed a writing course in the first semester of their master's program. The participants were both male and female.

Instruments

In order to do this research, the researcher employed following instruments: Cambridge Proficiency Test, a motivation questionnaire in Likert four-point scale of Birjandi and Hadidi [6] and a writing test.

The Cambridge Proficiency Test was used to have homogeneous participants in terms of their proficiency levels.

The motivation questionnaire in Likert four-point scale of Birjandi and Hadidi [6] was used in the second step of data gathering process. The participants were told that this is just a part of the project and there is no wrong or right answer and they were encouraged to write the truth. This questionnaire was used in order to determine the participants` levels of motivation. The lowest mark could be 39 and highest mark could be 195. It has four factors: interest/enjoyment, perceived competence, value/importance, and effort.

A writing task

The students were given a topic to write an essay on and then they were asked to score their own writing based on Wang and Liao "Writing Scoring Rubric.

Procedure

The researcher started to conduct this study on 3 classrooms where EFL learners were studying English. The data gathering was done in two sessions. In the first session, 68 students took a proficiency test, The Cambridge Proficiency Test, which includes 120 questions, to ensure their homogeneity.

It took about one hour. The tests were scored, then using box plot, 14 students marks were omitted from the participants. In this phase the highest and lowest marks are excluded. After that, 54 students who were homogeneous in terms of language proficiency were chosen as the participants in the main phase. In the second session, students took a motivation test including 39 questions. It took about 20 minutes. Based on their scores on motivation test, the subjects were divided into three groups of high, medium and low motivated if they fell above +0.5SD, within ±0.5 SD or below –0.5 SD respectively. And next, in the same session, all the students were given a topic to write an essay on that took about one hour. In addition, they were asked to read their own writing and score based on Writing Scoring Rubric modified from Wang and Liao [19]. It has five subscales: Focus, Elaboration/Support, Organization, Vocabulary and Conventions. Some of the students were not familiar with the concept of self-assessment. So, the researcher introduced to them the concept of self-assessment and its potential usefulness in academic settings. The particular self-assessment used in this study is in writing ability; that is, the students were given a topic to write an essay on and then they were asked to score their own writing based on Wang and Liao` Writing Scoring Rubric which was used in Ghoorchaei, B., Tavakoli, M.and Nejad Ansari, D [20].

Students should have also paid attention to the first and primary part of writing essay structure, the development of the thesis statement, body paragraphs, conclusion, outlining, and coherence. Since the participants were master students and they had learned all important parts of writing structures, it was supposed that they had the ability to accomplish all these aspects in their writing. The researcher was the rater. Also, in order to avoid subjective rating and ensure the intra-rater reliability of the assessment, these writing samples were marked twice based on the same scale that the students utilized in self-assessment.

DESIGN

The design of this study is an ex-post facto design for the following reasons: there was not any instructional treatment to bring about a change nor was there a control group, and the researcher did not have control over the variables. This is why researchers look at the type and / or degree of relationship between the two variables rather than at a cause-and-effect relation. Correlational designs are the most commonly used subset of ex-post facto designs [21].

Data analysis

In this study, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for different purposes. Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were used for selecting homogeneous students. Writing samples of the participants were evaluated subjectively by both the students themselves and the researcher. In order to enhance the reliability of subjective evaluation, all the terminology in the writing proficiency scale were explained to the students and the students were guided in the marking criteria. And also the rater, the researcher, was trained well enough to carry out rating. Intra-rater reliability was run to check the reliability of the rating of the writing samples. For the purpose of testing the hypotheses, inferential statistical procedures were applied. To test the first null hypothesis, one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was run using SPSS. And to test the second null hypothesis, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to find out the nature of the relationship between the variables of the study. Motivation is the independent variable and self-assessment is the dependent variable of the study.

Findings of the Study
Descriptive statistics of Student's motivation towards writing skill

Statistical indexes are based on interval scales. Table 1 below shows that the mean of the scores students got in the motivation questionnaire is 128.57. In addition, the median is 127; it shows that half of the participants got the score 127 or below it. 134 occurred most frequently. Variance 13.9 (standard deviation 14.86) shows that the data was medium distributed. The lowest score is 104 and the highest one is 161.

Table-1: Statistical Indexes Based on Students' Motivation Level

N	Valid	54
	Missing	0
mean		128.5741
Median		127
Mode		134
Variance		13.99946
Minimum		104
Maximum		161

The data in the table above shows the distribution of frequency of scores based on the motivation questionnaire.
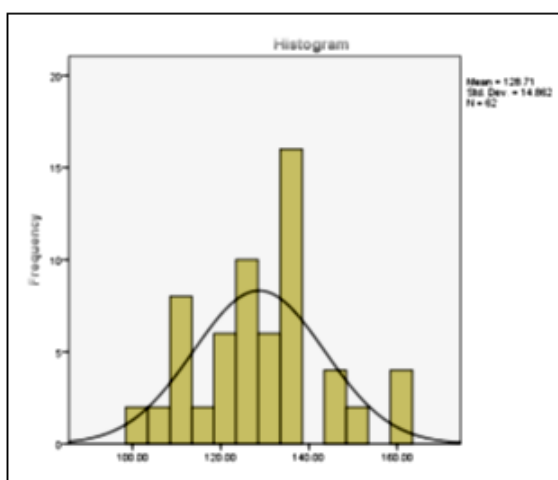
Fig-1: Distribution of the Data According to Students' Score in Motivation

Based on their scores on motivation test, the subjects were divided into three groups of high, medium and low motivated.

Table-2: Distribution of Frequency in Participants' Motivation Level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid N	Low	25	46.3	46.3	46.3
	medium	19	35.2	35.2	81.5
	High	10	18.5	18.5	100.00
	Total	54	100.0	100.0	54

The data in table-2 shows that 46.3, 35.2and 18.5 percent of participants were, low, medium and high motivated respectively and most of the participants are in low motivation group.
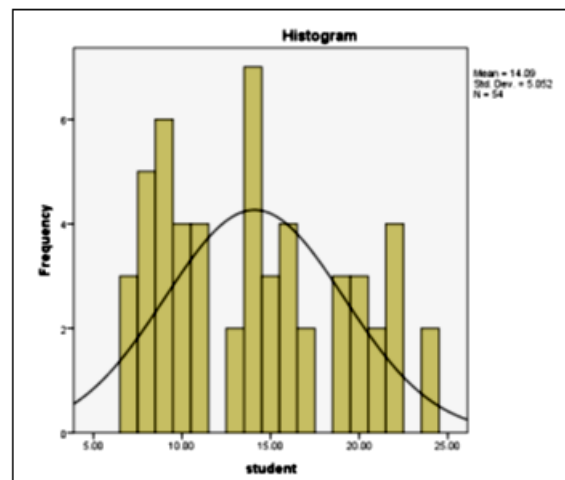
Descriptive Statistics of Students' self-assessment

Here is the descriptive statistics of student's self-assessment including mean, median, mode, standard deviation, the minimum score and the maximum score. The lowest score which they could get was 5 and the highest score was 25.

Table-3: Statistical Indexes Based on Student' Self-assessment Scores

Valid N	54
Missing N	0
mean	14.0926
Median	14.000
Mode	14.000
Std. Deviation	5.05169
Minimum	7.00
Maximum	24.00

This table shows that the mean of the scores students got in self-assessment is 14.09. In addition, the median is 14; it shows that half of the participants got the score 14 or below it. 14 occurred most frequently too. The lowest score is 7 and the highest score is 24. Distribution of students` self-assessment scores is normal Figure 4.2 shows this fact.

**Fig-2: Distribution of Frequency Based on Students' Self-assessment**

Descriptive statistics of teacher assessment

Intra-rater reliability was run to check the reliability of the rating of the speech samples. The researcher assessed students' writing samples two times in fixed temporal intervals. The intra-rater reliability estimates were found to be .86. The average of these two lists of scores is mentioned in the table.

Table-4: Distribution of Teacher's Assessment scores

Valid N	54
Missing N	0
mean	17.7037
Median	17.2500
Mode	13.00
Std. Deviation	4.01474
Minimum	12.00
Maximum	25.00

The table above shows that the mean of teacher's assessment total scores is 17.70. Half of the participants got the score 17.25 or below it. The most frequent score was 13. The highest score is 25 and the lowest score is 12. In addition, as you can see in figure 3 teacher assessment scores are normally distributed.
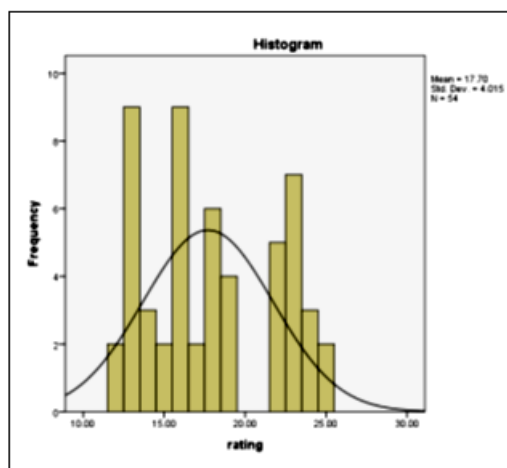
Fig-3: Distribution of Teacher Assessment Scores

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is used to see whether the motivation scores are normally distributed or not.

Table-5: Tests of Normality of Motivation Scores

Tests of Normality			
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Teachers` rating	.143	54	.068
Motivation	.102	54	.200*
Student self-assessment	.137	54	.83
*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.			
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction			

The *p*-values are above .05. This shows that the motivations scores, raters` scores and students' scores were normally distributed. As it can be seen in the table, raters' scores *p*-value is 0.068 which is higher than 0.5. Furthermore, the sig 2-tailed for motivation

scores is 0.200 which is much higher than significance level. And finally, students' ratings is also normally distributed since the *p*-value reached 0.083 which is again higher than 0.05.

Testing the first null hypothesis

The first hypothesis stated that there is no relationship between students` motivation and their self-assessment of writing ability. Participants were divided into three groups, low, medium and high motivated, according to their scores on the motivation questionnaire.

Table-6: Comparison of Motivation Group According to Their Self-assessment Scores

	Motivation	N	Mean
student	Low	25	14.12
	Medium	19	14.21
	High	7	13.80

The data in table above shows that the highest self-assessment scores belong to those who are in medium motivated group. And also the students with high motivation got the lowest self-assessment scores. In addition, one way ANOVA was run in SPSS to find out the nature of the relationship between motivation and students` self-assessment.

Table-7: ANOVA Test to Check the Relationship between Students' Motivation and Their Self-assessment Scores

Students					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.139	3	.570	.021	.979
Within Groups	1351.398	51	26.498		
Total	1352.537	54			

The table above shows that sig > 0.05 so there is no meaningful relationship between the students` motivation and self-assessment scores. So the first null hypothesis is confirmed. It should be mentioned however that there is a trend of difference in the sense that medium motivated subjects performed better than high motivated subjects and, high motivated subjects got the lowest scores in self-assessment, though such differences were not statistically significant.

Testing the second null hypothesis

The second hypothesis stated that there is no relationship between teacher's assessment and students' self-assessment. Pearson Correlation Coefficient was run in SPSS to test this hypothesis.

Table-8: Pearson Correlation Coefficient Test to Check the Relationship between Teacher's Assessment and Students' Self-assessment scores

Correlations		teacher	student
teacher	Pearson Correlation	1	.703
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	54	54
student	Pearson Correlation	.703*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	54	54
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

As shown in the table above the correlation coefficient is .703. Therefore we can say that there was a strong positive correlation between the variables of the study. Therefor the second null hypothesis, which said that there is no relationship between teacher's assessment and students' self-assessment was rejected.

DISCUSSION

The first research question was that is there any significant relationship between motivation and students" self-assessment in writing ability? The result of the quantitative data analysis showed that motivation and subjects" self-assessment in their writing did not have any significant relationship. Several educators observe that self-assessment is beneficial in encouraging students to follow a process in writing rather than composing an essay in one step, as often occurs when students write their drafts at the last minute and with little to no revision [22, 23]. Vallerand [24] asserted that, although his process should be individualized, it is important for students to be guided through the development of a personal process of writing. The suggestion is that reflective exercises encourage such development. In teaching students to work through a process, self-assessment forces revision and possibly introduces and reinforces the constructive habit of writing in a series of steps [25, 26, 24]. The result of this study suggested that teachers encourage self-assessment among their students regardless of their motivation capacities the second research question was that is there any significant relationship between students" self-assessment of writing ability and teacher's rating? The result of the study showed that there is a strong positive relationship between students" self-assessment of writing ability and teacher's rating. Teachers should bear in mind that assessment with timed-essays is incoherent with recent process-based approaches to teaching writing. Assessment should be viewed as an enterprise involving all stakeholders, i.e. students, peers, and teachers.

Involving students in the assessment process might pave the way for learner autonomy. In developing curricula and writing syllabi, special attention should be given to students' self-assessment of their learning. This not only will give the teachers a full portrait of students' learning but also will be a motivating factor for students to pursue their learning more meaningfully. In this study results showed that there was a strong positive correlation between teacher and self-assessment. This might be due to the fact that the students were not trained in self-assessment and they are used to traditional teacher assessment which is prevalent in Asian educational context. Although the findings of this study may not be generalizable to the population of Iranian EFL students at large, it sheds light on the issue of self-assessment in essay writing classes.

In sum, as the above arguments indicate, self-assessment does not differ according to the style and individual characteristics of the learners. As this study shows, it cannot exactly be said that the more motivated the students are, the better scores they get in their writing and the better writers they are because there is no relation between students" motivation and their self-assessment scores. It seems that self-assessment may best serve as a complementary instrument to traditional assessment that teachers should work on it more.

CONCLUSION

The techniques of self-assessment and evaluation play important part in evaluating the effectiveness of individual learning, enhancing their motivation, and training learners for lifelong learning. Learners need to assess their progress and accomplishments in order to plan their future learning. It seems that self-assessment cannot raise the students" self-awareness about their metacognitive conditions. As the results of the study also revealed enhancing learners" intrinsic motivation cannot be used as an effective tool improving their writing skill. This is absolutely important in our Iranian EFL context which highly depends on the role of the teacher in teaching and evaluation. It is generally assumed that in teacher-centered classes, despite being knowledgeable, students lack self-confidence. Only concentrating on students' intrinsic motivation, as shown in this study, cannot be used as an effective tool in helping the learners "think aloud" on paper, and get involved in the process of their own learning but it can be a side helping tool for teachers.

Despite a number of difficulties in appropriately implementing self-assessment, the ways in which we resolve these issues will certainly provide valuable insights into the nature of language teaching, learning, and assessment. When these challenges are met, it is hoped that language institutions and classroom

teachers will consider the potential of self-assessment as both a valid and reliable supplement to traditional assessment, and its effective role in promoting self-directed learning.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Different studies have been done about motivation with different relations; speaking, complexity and grammatical accuracy, reading, and so on. Other studies are recommended for further research to enrich our understanding of the implementation of writing assessment in EFL contexts with a longitudinal framework. The participants of this study were M.A. students of Khatam ol-Anbia University who are majoring in English language teaching. Other studies with students of various levels of writing and at different universities can be done to consolidate the findings. Butler and Lee [27] emphasized that self-assessment is a very complex cognitive and metacognitive activity. It is a social activity that can be affected by various social and affective factors which in turn vary from one activity to another. Since the results of the present study are based on a single administration of writing task not a continuous record of the participants" performance on long-term self-assessment, cautions must be taken when generalizing the results of the study to other contexts. The study involved the direct assessment of the learners" performance circumscribed to a restricted set of classroom activities, and the learners" performance on the task might differ in different contexts. And also to test the many theories of the effect of self-assessment in students" writing outcomes, additional studies of self-assessment practices using experimental methods should be conducted in future research. In addition, the present study only investigated motivation as an individual variable. The effects of age, gender, learning styles, and strategies that were left untouched in the present study can be handled in further research.

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