

The Relationship Between University EFL Students' Self-Regulation and Writing Performance

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Abstract—The current study aims to find out the correlation between Iraqi University EFL students' self-regulation and writing performance. This is a correlational study with a sample size of 360 EFL students from various universities in Iraq during the academic year 2022-2023. To achieve the aims of this study, two instruments were used: a questionnaire developed by Brown (2007) was adopted to find out students' self-regulation, and a writing performance test was used to assess students' writing performance. After ensuring the psychometric features, the researchers applied the two instruments to the sample of the study. The results of this study reveal that students have a good level of self-regulation and a rational level of writing performance. Furthermore, the findings also show that the participants' self-regulation is statistically correlated with their writing performance. In addition, Iraqi EFL University students' self-regulation and writing performance are correlated positively.

Index Terms—self-regulation, metacognition, self-monitoring, writing performance

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing in a foreign language (FL) is one of the most important skills to have in both school and the workplace, according to surveys like Hayland's (2003). However, it's not always easy for students to learn how to write well in FL. When learning a second language (L2), students learn both the language and how to write in it at the same time. This is different from learning a first language (L1). Several studies have shown that writing in a second language (L2) has its issues. When writing in the target language, it's hard for L2 learners, especially those who aren't very good at it yet, to use the grammar and vocabulary they already know in their first language (Weigle, 2005). In the same way, Hinkel (2011) discovered that "L2 written discourse patterns are essentially, strategically, and comprehensively different from those found in L1 writing" (p. 528).

Zimmerman and Lebeau (2000) wrote that learning that is based on self-regulation is when students are excited about learning and take charge of their learning based on their own needs. He defined this as the emotions, thoughts, and actions that are shown to reach a certain academic goal (p. 30).

Özbay and Daşöz (2016) said that we need to raise people who are responsible for writing instruction, who can take charge of their writing processes, who are active participants in these processes, who can count on their skills, and who use these skills in a good way. Learning based on self-regulation is an important part of reaching this goal (p. 56).

In 2008, Zimmerman used a poll to show that self-regulation-based learning means that a person is able to take charge of their learning and make their educational path based on their own needs and wants. Here, it's possible to say that a person is fully responsible for their learning and actively plans their learning (p. 166).

When Schunk and Zimmerman wrote a paper in 2007, they said that students who are good at self-regulation are very aware of their surroundings and want to learn because they are sure they can ensure their growth. Because of issues like not liking writing and being anxious about it, research on teaching writing needs to be done in a more organized way, and teachers need to use a variety of methods and styles when they teach writing. Writing training based on self-regulation is one of these ways (p. 25). So, we need to look into the possible link between students' ability to control themselves and how well they write in language (Ali et al., 2022; Bairmani et al., 2022).

The purpose of this study is to show how important it is to get students to think deeply to help them get better at writing. It will also check if there is a link between self-regulation and writing performance. Self-regulation is how a learner uses motivational, metacognitive, and communicative strategies to actively seek out knowledge and master it.

This study gives teachers ideas on how to improve the writing skills of EFL students so that they can do better in writing. But the best way to explain the problem of this study is to answer the following research questions:

1. What are Iraqi University EFL students' self-regulation and writing performance levels?
2. Is there a significant correlation between University EFL students' self-regulation and their writing performance levels?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Writing Skill

Pardiyono (2010) mentions that writing is an activity that expresses a message through a text that can be read by the reader. It can be understood since studying languages tends to focus on the usage of the language as a means of communication to convey messages (p. 1).

One important thing about writing is that it can be used for more than just conversation. It can also be used to learn new things. Because English is a library language, it is being used as a standard in schools all over the world. So, writing can help people get around the problems that speech has, like limited time and room. Archibald (2001), on the other hand, says that writing is a skill that requires understanding and skill in many areas. It is expected of students who try to learn English they answer questions on tests in English. People who speak a second language rarely find it hard to learn how to write (Dehham et al., 2022).

Norman (2013) mentions that "writing is a skill that is productive and interactive at the same time. It is productive because we believe that, seen from a broader perspective, in the sense that when we write, we produce language to convey our thoughts to others, and it is interactive in the sense that when we write we try to fulfill a purpose and deliver a message to a reader who is usually in our mind" (p. 127).

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners must focus on developing their writing skills as a crucial objective during their academic journey. Banat (2007, p. 4) highlights the crucial role of writing in enhancing students' communication skills and comprehension of the structural components of language. According to Conley (1995, p. 12), writing enhances the clarity and durability of thoughts and experiences and facilitates learning across all academic disciplines.

Writing is the art of crafting words that possess greater significance. It ranks among the most intricate human endeavors. The process includes coming up with a design idea, learning how to think about knowledge, and being exposed to different things. Cognitive psychology, stylistics, rhetoric, text linguistics, critical literary theory, hypertext theory, second language acquisition, and writing pedagogy (Ali, 2012) are just some of the fields that have looked into the complicated dynamics of writing by both new and experienced writers.

(1). Aspects of Writing

They can be classified as:

-Micro and Macro Skills:

Researchers who study writing have thought that writing skills are made up of several smaller skills. They can be used to teach and grade work by the teacher. Brown (2007, p. 343) says that writing has two main types of skills: macro-skills and micro-skills.

Micro-skills, such as cohesive devices, past tense, and other word-level features, are used by planners to describe how writing works. But macro skills focus on bigger parts of writing, such as the main idea, supporting ideas, style, and purpose of communication in written text, among other things. That's why it's not just the word but the whole written text (Brown, 2007, p. 220).

(2). Mechanical Components of Writing

Writing, like any other skill, has its mechanisms. Norman et al. (2005, p. 45) say that "mechanism" is "the sub-skill that includes things like spelling, punctuation, abbreviations, acronyms, etc. Jacobs and Perrin (2014) say that mechanics is "the use of graphic convention of the language, i.e., the steps of arranging letters, words, and paragraphs by using knowledge of structure and some others related to one another" (p. 185).

Harmer (2004, p. 44) states that the mechanical parts of writing include things like correct handwriting, spelling, grammar, and the ability to put together well-written sentences, paragraphs, and texts. He articulates that these are the most important parts of being able to write well. Because of this, it is very important to teach them about the method of writing.

Coherence and Cohesion

Both cohesiveness and coherence are now firmly established in the writing process. To achieve a more acceptable writing style, it is necessary to have both cohesiveness and coherence. Cohesion pertains to the interconnected interactions that exist among the sentences and clauses within the textual structure (Karadeniz, 2017, p. 93). Coherence, as defined by Murray and Hughes (2008, p. 45), refers to the act of maintaining a logical progression of ideas sequentially. Without a coherent linkage between ideas, the associations become ambiguous.

Karadeniz (2017, p. 94) states that several elements influence coherence. These factors include conjunction, punctuation, tenses, and textual meaning.

According to Richard (2007, p. 21), sentences must have cohesion, and the entire paragraph must be coherent. Coherence, as described by Karadeniz (2017, p. 94), refers to the comprehensive connection encompassing all structural and semantic relations among the sentences of a manuscript. The readability and comprehensibility of written works can be determined. Grammar, syntactic structure, and linguistic characteristics also influence the readability and comprehensibility of written works (Karadeniz, 2017, p. 94).

According to Oshima and Hogue (1999, p. 40), achieving coherence in writing requires the writer to pay attention to the flow and progression of sentences. The sentences must exhibit a seamless and coherent flow. To establish coherence,

the writer can employ four strategies: repetition of essential nouns, utilization of transaction signals, incorporation of pronouns, and organization of sentences in a logical sequence.

Karadeniz (2017, p. 94) affirms that four fundamental abilities are crucial for writing proficiency. One of the key aspects is grammatical characteristics, which refers to the capacity to construct grammatically accurate sentences. The second set of abilities pertains to the mastery of stylistic techniques, which encompass the capacity to skillfully manage and manipulate sentences for maximum impact. The third skill is technical proficiency, which requires mastery of punctuation, spelling, and other related aspects. The last assessment focuses on one's judgment abilities, which refer to the capacity to effectively compose written content by carefully selecting pertinent material.

Like any other skill, writing has its mechanical components. According to Norman et al. (2005), mechanics refers to a specific set of abilities that include punctuation, spelling, abbreviations, acronyms, and related components (p. 45).

It is important to mention that Harmer (2004) defines the mechanical aspects of writing as including handwriting, spelling, punctuation, and the ability to create proficient phrases, paragraphs, and texts. He claims that these components are the essential characteristics of writing competence. Hence, it is imperative to familiarize them with the pedagogy and process of writing (p. 44).

(3). Types of Writing

There are four forms of writing, according to Setyawan (2018). They are as follows:

(a). *Description*

The description aims to evoke in the reader the same emotions, visuals, and sounds experienced by the writer. A description might be objective or illustrative. Objective description is concerned with facts or technicalities that do not necessitate judgment or emotional response. The objective is primarily to convey facts, whereas suggestive description includes the writer's impressions and sentiments about what he or she is describing. Furthermore, descriptive paragraphs can be separated into two types: place descriptions and person descriptions (Setyawan, 2018, pp. 12–13).

(b). *Narration*

Narration is the act of recounting a story. It entails writing about a real or hypothetical incident or chain of occurrences. Events are recounted in chronological order in storytelling. However, the goal of narrative writing is not always to simply recount a series of events. A narrative may have a message that the writer wishes to convey.

(c). *Exposition*

This sort of writing's purpose is to provide information or an explanation about an object or subject. Expository writing is typically more tightly ordered, with information organized according to the goal of the writing and the relationship necessitated by the subject matter. A paragraph describing how something works must be organized chronologically and step-by-step. Furthermore, expository writing should be exact, straightforward, and direct. Expository writing examples include factual reports and procedure descriptions (Setyawan, 2018, pp. 12–13).

(d). *Argumentation*

Argumentation is a type of writing in which the author argues for a specific idea and attempts to persuade the readers to accept his or her point of view. Argumentative authors not only enlighten but also strive to persuade their readers that their point of view is correct. Argumentative writing can be more challenging because the writer cannot see the readers' faces, hear their voices, or feel their presence. As a result, argumentative writing involves careful organization, audience analysis, and adequate evidence to convince the reader that the writer's point of view is correct.

(4). Steps of Writing Process

(a). *Generating Ideas*

The initial phase of the writing process involves brainstorming or collecting ideas. This stage is a task that stimulates students to recall factual information and personal stories, as well as identify patterns, before engaging in writing (Pharr & Santi, 2005, p. 40). Seasoned writers consistently engage in prewriting activities to determine the content and structure of their writing. This may involve extensive note-taking or simply jotting down a few concise sentences.

Several students, in reality, continue to abstain from taking any preliminary notes (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 315). During this phase, inexperienced writers benefit from guidance in employing strategies such as mind-mapping, brainstorming, and clustering to foster the development of concepts and motivate creativeness (Bjork & Corona, 2006, p. 17). When writing, authors should take into account various factors. These factors include the purpose of the writing and the intended audience, as they will affect the selection of content. Additionally, authors should consider the language they use, deciding whether to adopt a formal or informal tone, which will determine choices such as vocabulary and grammar. Lastly, authors should carefully structure their writing, deciding how to arrange the facts, ideas, or arguments they wish to include (Nunan, 1999, p. 272).

(b). *Drafting*

A draft is the first version of a piece of writing. Frequently, writers expect to revise the first draft of a work later. Some versions may be produced on the route to the final version throughout the writing process, which progresses to the editing stage (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 317).

Conferencing is a highly prevalent method employed at this stage. Conferencing is a highly prevalent procedure. While the students are writing, the teacher can help a student in collecting ideas, structuring them, and choosing suitable language. Reformulation is a highly effective method that students can utilize. Upon finishing an initial draft, students

are given the chance to advance and discern any discrepancies between their work and the desired model (Hedge, 2008, p. 313).

(c). Revising

This technique is crucial because it assists students in shaping their work and preparing manuscripts for publication (Hedge, 2008, p. 23). After completing a rough draft, writers revise it to improve the organization and clarity of their thoughts (Langan, 2001, p. 26). The writers can accomplish this by working in groups or through peer reviewing, which involves using classmates' opinions. According to Harmer (2004, p. 12), professors ask students to edit through collaborative writing, i.e., they make changes through pair or group collaboration.

(d). Editing

Students confirm the presence of spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors in the penultimate version (Langan, 2001). As stated by Brown (2007, p. 34), this will offer instructors a valuable chance to assume the position of 'facilitator' and tackle particular areas of concern.

(e). Publishing

It is the ultimate phase of the writing process, occurring after students have made the necessary modifications they see necessary. Students are now ready to finalize their work and disseminate it to the target audience. Donohue (2009, p. 14) states that the last phase involves students sharing, reflecting on, and evaluating their writing. Johnson (2008, p. 112) suggests that a cooperative and responsive climate is conducive to the development of students' writing skills. Consequently, the ultimate version should be devoid of errors and submitted to the teacher or another authority for assessment.

B. Self-Regulation

Zimmerman (2002) defines self-regulation (S.R.) as the capacity to develop thoughts, emotions, and actions that lead to the fulfillment of one's goals. This component enables learners to take control of their learning (Tseng et al., 2006). In recent times, psychologists and educators in the field of L2 have directed their attention toward self-regulated learning as a novel approach to aid learners in effectively mastering the learning process and enhancing the overall quality of learning (Zito et al., 2007).

Self-regulated learning, as defined by Chen (2002), refers to the process of individuals taking initiative in their learning. This involves setting specific goals, making strategic efforts to attain those goals, assessing one's progress, effectively managing time, and adapting the learning environment to optimize learning outcomes. Individuals with a high level of self-control can achieve success in various situations and find effective solutions while engaging in a purposeful task (Zimmerman, 2002).

According to Winne and Jamieson-Noel (2003), self-regulated learners can be defined as individuals who: (a) establish objectives to enhance their understanding; (b) possess awareness of their arousal levels and employ strategies to regulate their emotions; (c) consistently take care of themselves and accomplish their goals; and (d) adjust and modify their strategies based on their progress.

Self-regulated learning pertains to a student's ability to autonomously oversee and govern their process of acquiring knowledge, without relying on external aid. This activity is crucial in the student's learning process and is linked to Bandura's social-cognitive learning theory. Self-efficacy for self-regulation, as defined by Klassen and Georgiou (2008), is the belief an individual has in their ability to effectively plan and organize their learning, maintain focus despite distractions, and adequately prepare for the challenges of school. Throughout the writing process, writers utilize diverse cognitive processes including prewriting, brainstorming, self-regulation, self-assessment, and introspection. Writers must also partake in processes such as comprehending the subject matter, acquiring supplementary information, being driven by the content, and structuring and categorizing their ideas. Lienemann and Reid (2008) is an instance.

Self-regulated learning refers to the ability to recognize and control one's learning environment. Goal planning, self-monitoring, self-instruction, and self-reinforcement are examples of self-regulation skills (Harris & Graham, 1999; Schraw et al., 2006; Shunk, 1996). It is important to distinguish self-regulation from cognitive aptitude or any ability that is directly linked to academic success. Self-regulation refers to the process by which learners convert their cognitive ability into skills and habits through a developmental process. This process is facilitated by guided practice and feedback.

Components of Self-Regulation

The three fundamental processes of academic self-regulation, namely planning, problem-solving, and self-evaluation, typically follow a precise order (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2012; Zimmerman, 2008).

(a). Planning

Academically self-regulated students engage in proactive planning. They evaluate their educational objectives and ascertain their relevance, worth, fascination, and achievability. Upon setting a goal, these pupils exhibit motivation and independently take action to accomplish it. They exhibit diligent effort, possess self-assurance, and anticipate achieving success. In addition, they demonstrate active participation in their learning and exhibit perseverance in completing assignments (Bandura, 2006; Urdan & Midgely, 2008). Academically self-regulated children perceive the objective as a specific goal or endpoint, utilize it to determine task priorities, and have the ability to select the areas on which to concentrate their attention. They possess the ability to effectively organize and manage their academic endeavors by utilizing certain time intervals (Bandura, 2006).

(b). Problem Solving

Academically self-regulated students possess and utilize problem-solving skills. Individuals employ strategies to achieve their objectives, arrange the selected tactics in a certain order, set benchmarks to evaluate the excellence of their execution, regulate their focus, and oversee their adherence to the established standards and advancement towards their aims. If they experience frustration during the process, they actively strive to resolve the matter. They exhibit a lack of procrastination and demonstrate awareness of any discrepancies that may arise between their actions, objectives, and benchmarks for success.

(c). Self-Evaluation

Academically self-regulated learners engage in self-evaluation. They assess the results of their endeavors about their goals, interpret the significance of the outcome, and reflect on whether they acted in alignment with their standards or convictions. Upon achieving satisfactory results, these young individuals experience a sense of contentment, leading to a boost in their academic drive. They often experience anguish when they are unsatisfied with the outcomes, but they can harness that emotion as a motivation to enhance.

III. METHODOLOGY

The current study employed a descriptive technique since it was the most suitable method for examining the interaction between variables and highlighting the distinctions among them to explain and analyze the phenomenon under investigation (Gall et al., 2007). A correlational study is a type of research that aims to assess the presence and strength of a relationship between two or more variables. It is considered a descriptive investigation as it involves collecting data to analyze the level of correlation (Al-Bakri & Salman, 2020; Gay et al., 2009).

(1). Population and Sampling

A population is a distinct group of individuals or entities, including both human and non-human objects, institutions, time, units, etc. (Mills & Gay, 2019). The current study's population consists of Iraqi EFL third-stage university students at the College of Education, English Department, excluding the Kurdistan area, during the academic year 2022-2023.

The study sample involves 360 Iraqi EFL students chosen at random from three Iraqi universities: Babylon, Basrah, and Mosul (See Table 1).

TABLE 1
THE SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

No	Name of University	No. Sample
1	Babylon	97
2	Babylon	191
3	Mosul	72
Total		360

(2). Description of the Study Instruments

Two tools were utilized to accomplish the objectives of the present study. They are; SWQ and WPT:

(a). Self-Regulatory Writing Questionnaire (SWQ)

A questionnaire developed by Brown and Lee (2025) has been used to assess students' self-regulation. The system comprises 37 components categorized into seven domains: planning and drafting, information management strategies, monitoring, revision, and evaluation. The scoring system is based on a five-point Likert scale, with the options of strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and neutral. Assign scores of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 to positive items accordingly, while negative items are assigned scores in reverse order.

The total score for the questionnaire is determined by adding up the scores acquired by the respondent for each selected item on the scale. The maximum possible score that the respondent can achieve is 185, while the lowest possible score is 37.

(b). Writing Performance Test (WPT)

To accomplish the study objective, we implemented a writing performance assessment.

Celce-Murcia and Yoo (2014) define an emotive writing exam as a form of personal writing that involves composing letters or emails to friends to describe personal experiences.

The researcher formulates the test. The students must compose a 250-word essay in English on a specified topic to evaluate their writing proficiency. The writing subject is selected based on previously addressed issues and the criterion of authenticity. The writing section utilizes the analytic scoring scheme put forward by Brown (2007). The objective of this process is to yield more accurate and dependable data regarding pupils' writing proficiency. The scoring scheme comprises five categories for evaluating students' responses. Scorers assign a score ranging from 0 to 6 to each criterion, and students in this section receive a cumulative score between 6 and 30. To accomplish the primary objective of the study, we implemented a writing performance test.

Celce-Murcia and Yoo (2014) define an emotive writing exam as a form of personal writing that involves composing letters or emails to friends to describe personal experiences.

We select the writing topic based on previously addressed subjects and the criterion of genuineness. To evaluate the student's writing proficiency, they must compose a 250-word essay in English on a designated topic. The writing component utilizes the analytic scoring scheme put forth by Brown (2007). The objective of this process is to yield more accurate and dependable data regarding pupils' writing proficiency. The scoring scheme comprises five categories for evaluating students' responses. Scorers assign a score ranging from 0 to 6 to each criterion, and pupils in this section receive an overall score between 6 and 30.

During the examination, students must focus on five key elements of writing: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, all of which are graded. Teachers administer the test to assess pupils' writing proficiency.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To assess the levels of self-regulation and writing performance among Iraqi university students studying English as a foreign language (EFL), the arithmetic means and standard deviation were computed.

The researchers utilized a one-sample t-test to compare the arithmetic and theoretical means. Analysis of the gathered data indicates that the participants possess a high degree of SR, as evidenced by the arithmetic mean score of 111.903 and a standard deviation of 22.847. This is in line with the theoretical mean of 111. The computed t-value (5.733) exceeds the crucial value (1.96). Refer to Table 2 and Figure 1 for visual representation:

TABLE 2
ARITHMETIC MEAN, STANDARD DEVIATION, AND T-VALUE OF THE SR SCALE

Variable	Sample Size	Arithmetic Mean	S.D	Theoretical Mean	t-Value		Significance (0.05)
					Computed	Critical	
Self-regulation	360	111.903	22.847	111	5.733	1.96	significant

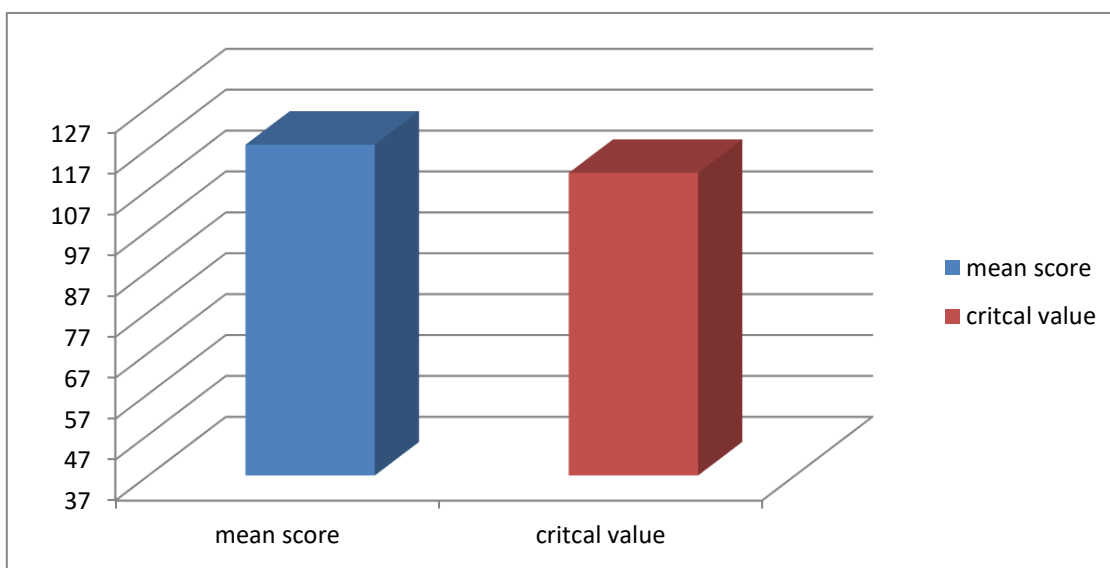


Figure 1. Arithmetic and Hypothetical Mean of the Self-Regulation Scale

The arithmetic means and standard deviation was calculated to evaluate the levels of self-regulation and writing ability among Iraqi university students who are learning English as a foreign language (EFL).

The researchers employed a one-sample t-test to compare the arithmetic and theoretical means. The analysis of the collected data reveals that the participants exhibit a significant level of self-regulation (SR), as demonstrated by the average score of 111.903 and a standard deviation of 22.847. This aligns with the theoretical average of 111. The calculated t-value (5.733) surpasses the critical value (1.96). Consult Table 2 and Graphic 1 for visual depiction:

TABLE 3
MEAN, STANDARD DEVIATION, AND T-VALUE OF THE WRITING PERFORMANCE TEST

Variable	Sample Size	M Arithmetic	S.D	Theoretical Mean	t-Value		Significance (0.05)
					Computed	Critical	
Writing Performance test	360	20.306	2.766	17.5	19.176	1.96	Significant

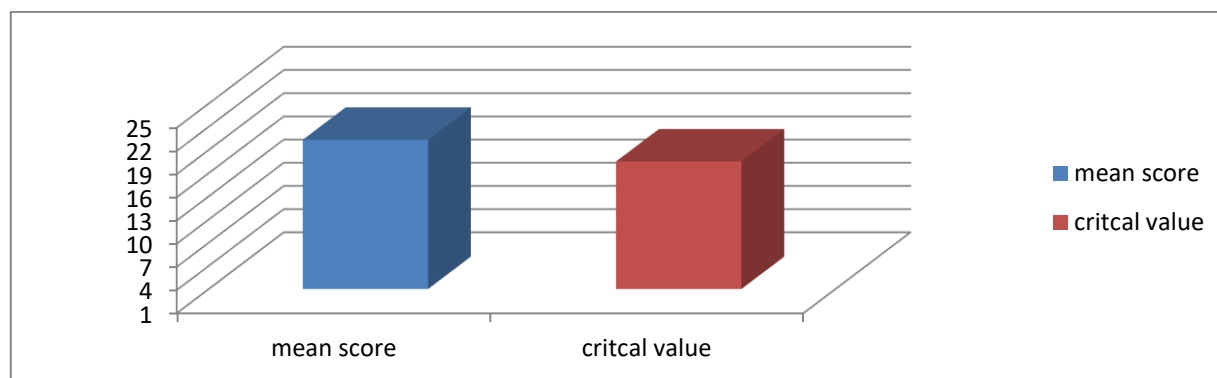


Figure 2. Arithmetic and Hypothetical Mean of the Writing Performance Test

To accomplish the second objective, the Pearson correlation coefficient and T-test were employed to ascertain the correlation between SR and WPT among Iraqi University EFL students, as well as to establish the significance of the calculated correlation coefficients. Table 4 displays the correlation coefficients between SR and WPT, which is measured at 0.449.

TABLE 4
THE CORRELATION BETWEEN SELF-REGULATION AND WRITING PERFORMANCE

Variable	Sample Size	Value. *Cr	t- Value		Significance (0.05)
			Computed	Tabulated	
Writing Performance	360	0.449	9.978	1.96	Significant

*Cr: Correlation

According to Table 4, the correlation between SR and WPT is a statistically significant positive one. This is indicated by the computed t-values of SR and WPT (0.449), which are greater than the critical values at the 0.05 level of significance and with 358 degrees of freedom. This outcome confirms a substantial link between the two variables. In other words, the study found that individuals with higher levels of self-regulation demonstrated superior writing skills.

Based on the current study, the results show that Iraqi university students studying English as a foreign language possess a high degree of self-regulation. This demonstrates the students' proficiency in critical thinking, strategizing, identifying, generating, deducing, and communicating knowledge effectively. Regarding the aspect of writing performance, it was discovered that the students exhibit a modest level of writing proficiency, which is statistically significant. Moreover, the data derived from the study instruments indicate a statistically significant association between the students' self-regulation and their writing performance. Moreover, the self-regulation of Iraqi university students studying English as a foreign language plays a significant role in elucidating the differences in their writing abilities.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of previous findings and discussions about the objectives of the study, it can be inferred that Iraqi university students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) exhibit a commendable degree of self-regulation and a reasonable level of writing proficiency. Furthermore, the study results indicate that there is a positive correlation between the level of self-regulation exhibited by Iraqi university students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and their writing proficiency. In other words, the more self-regulated these students are, the more proficient their writing will be. Consequently, a statistical relationship exists between the ability of Iraqi university students who are learning English as a foreign language to control their behavior and their proficiency in writing. Moreover, the study instruments' results indicate that the students' self-regulation and writing performance has a favorable impact on explaining the variability in writing performance.

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