

The role of self-confidence in essay writing among high school students in a private institution in Riobamba, Ecuador

El papel de la autoconfianza en la escritura de ensayos entre estudiantes de bachillerato de una institución privada en Riobamba, Ecuador

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explored students' perceptions of the role of self-confidence in EFL essay writing and identified the main internal and external factors associated with their confidence during writing tasks at a private school in Riobamba, Ecuador. Data were collected through a focus group with seven final-year high school students and semi-structured interviews with two English teachers. The analysis identified five recurring categories: self-confidence, motivation, assessment, feedback, and English language proficiency. Participants described self-confidence as closely related to their emotional state, willingness to write, assessment experiences, teacher and peer feedback, and perceived linguistic resources. Students generally valued teacher feedback more than peer feedback, particularly when they needed support with vocabulary, grammar, and organization of ideas. The findings suggest that self-confidence is not perceived as an isolated factor in writing performance, but as a dynamic element shaped by affective, linguistic, and classroom-related conditions. The study highlights the importance of supportive writing environments and guidance that helps students view mistakes as part of the learning process.

Keywords: Self-confidence; Writing; Communication skills; Motivation; Assessment

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Resumen

Este estudio de caso cualitativo exploró las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre el papel de la autoconfianza en la escritura de ensayos en inglés como lengua extranjera e identificó los principales factores internos y externos asociados con su confianza durante las tareas de escritura en una institución privada de Riobamba, Ecuador. Los datos se recopilaron mediante un grupo focal con siete estudiantes del último año de bachillerato y entrevistas semiestructuradas con dos docentes de inglés. El análisis identificó cinco categorías recurrentes: autoconfianza, motivación, evaluación, retroalimentación y dominio del idioma inglés. Los participantes describieron la autoconfianza como estrechamente relacionada con su estado emocional, disposición para escribir, experiencias de evaluación, retroalimentación de docentes y compañeros, y recursos lingüísticos percibidos. Los estudiantes valoraron generalmente más la retroalimentación docente que la de sus compañeros, especialmente cuando necesitaban apoyo con vocabulario, gramática y organización de ideas. Los hallazgos sugieren que la autoconfianza no se percibe como un factor aislado en el desempeño escrito, sino como un elemento dinámico condicionado por factores afectivos, lingüísticos y relacionados con el aula. El estudio destaca la importancia de crear entornos de escritura favorables y brindar orientación que ayude a los estudiantes a comprender los errores como parte del proceso de aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: Autoconfianza; Escritura; Habilidades comunicativas; Motivación; Evaluación

Introduction

During the language learning process, students are expected to develop four main language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Previous studies have pointed out that writing is considered one of the most difficult language skills, since it not only requires students to use grammatical and lexical knowledge, but also to ensure coherence and cohesion in their write-ups (Nunan, 2003; Pasand & Haghi, 2013; Vijayan et al., 2025). Furthermore, writing is a skill that requires learners to convey a message to an audience when writing for an audience, learners must express their ideas clearly enough for readers to understand the intended message. The message without any misunderstanding. Due to this cognitive and communicative challenge. Writing is therefore a complex skill to master, and even some native speakers may struggle with it. Therefore, it becomes even more demanding for English learners whose native language is not English (Alfehaid & Alkhatib, 2024; Bakla & Karakas, 2022).

Given that context, students might experience frustration, anxiety, and low motivation for not being able to meet the writing expectations, which in turn undermines students' self-confidence in their own abilities. Self-confidence is defined as the belief in one's ability to complete a task effectively. According to Bandura (1986), in his Social Cognitive Theory, self-confidence impacts students' motivation, learning, and performance. This becomes a psychological factor that might influence students' writing tasks. For example, when learners perceive writing as particularly challenging, they may develop a fear of making mistakes, creating a barrier that may lead students to avoid writing tasks, get blocked, or produce shorter and less organized texts (Mardiansyah, 2018).

Previous studies have reported a positive relationship between self-confidence and language learning (Akbari & Sahibzada, 2020; Dhanya & Alamelu, 2019; Pham et al., 2021; Putri et al., 2024) and the importance of considering both internal and external factors: age, motivation, mother tongue, classroom environment and class size, to name a few (Wijaya & Mbato, 2020). Based

on this idea, students with higher self-confidence are more likely to engage in writing activities, reflect on their performance and make further attempts to improve their writing, and try again to improve the results of the task. In contrast, students who lack self-confidence express negative emotions that could limit their progress (Martínez & Villa, 2016).

Despite these findings, the relationship between self-confidence and writing performance appears to be more complex. Rui Li (2022), suggests that self-confidence might not influence writing directly (how well students do the task), but instead students' emotions (how they feel). In contrast, Zikrullah's (2017), findings showed that reported little evidence of a significant relationship between self-confidence and writing performance, and therefore self-confidence may not always impact students' writing outcomes. These contrasting findings demonstrate the importance of further research to explore how self-confidence interacts with other factors, such as psychological or external factors in specific writing contexts. Although studies have explored the relationship between self-confidence and writing skills, there is limited empirical research on the role of self-confidence in writing within the Ecuadorian EFL context. Furthermore, even though previous studies have examined the factors that make students have difficulties while writing, relatively few have examined students' affective experiences during writing activities during these activities. Understanding how students perceive their own level of self-confidence can help teachers analyze students' emotions that shape writing performance. Hence, considering students' experiences, teachers can design activities that help reduce or overcome psychological barriers, considering that writing complexity should not be a limitation for students.

his study aimed to analyze students' perceptions of the role of self-confidence in EFL essay writing and to identify the main internal and external factors associated with their confidence during writing tasks at a private school in Riobamba, Ecuador. A qualitative approach was used, including a focus group of students to gather data on their attitude and confidence when doing writing activities, as well as semi-structured interviews with two teachers to triangulate the data. In line with the aim of the study, the present research seeks to answer the following questions:

What internal and external factors are associated with students' self-confidence during the writing process?

How do students perceive the influence of these factors on their self-confidence when writing essays?

How do teachers describe the role of students' self-confidence in their writing performance?

Theoretical Framework

This research draws on Bandura's (1986), Social Cognitive Theory, particularly its explanation of self-regulation. Within this perspective, self-regulation involves individuals monitoring and evaluating their actions, thoughts, and motivation in relation to their goals. In an EFL context,

this process can be observed when students regulate their effort and actions according to the goals they expect to achieve. Bandura (1986), explains that this self-regulatory process operates through three main mechanisms: self-monitoring, judgment of one's behavior, and self-reaction.

Self-monitoring refers to individuals' awareness of their own performance and its effectiveness. It involves noticing the conditions under which an activity takes place, the results of one's actions, and the progress being made. Observing their own progress can motivate individuals to establish new goals and create a continuous process of reflection and adjustment. However, Bandura argues that self-monitoring is not an automatic process and may be influenced by internal and external factors such as emotions, motivation, classroom environment, grades, teacher feedback, and interactions with classmates. Thus, students with greater confidence may devote more effort to improving their performance, whereas students with lower confidence may focus more strongly on mistakes and overlook signs of progress.

Systematic self-observation goes beyond passive reflection because it provides information that individuals can use to evaluate their performance and adjust their behavior. Through this process, individuals determine whether their performance is satisfactory by comparing it with personal goals, previous performance, classmates' achievements, teacher expectations, or standardized rubrics. This self-evaluation depends on how meaningful the activity appears to learners and how they interpret the causes of their performance. Although these comparisons can provide useful information, they may also undermine students' self-confidence when learners compare themselves with higher-performing classmates or attribute unsuccessful performance to factors beyond their control.

The final component involves individuals' reactions to their judgments about their own performance. These reactions may be positive, negative, or neutral and can influence subsequent behavior. Positive reactions may include satisfaction, pride, or willingness to use feedback and continue improving, whereas negative reactions may involve frustration or avoidance of similar tasks. Although negative reactions may initially appear detrimental, they may also encourage reflection and further effort when students are willing to make changes. Bandura (1986), notes that individuals may make greater efforts when they associate their objectives with rewards. However, goals should remain realistic and achievable to avoid weakening confidence. This idea is supported by Schunk and Gunn (1986), who noted that students are more willing to participate in activities when they perceive themselves as capable of meeting task demands.

The combination of these self-regulatory processes illustrates how learners' beliefs about themselves may influence how they observe, evaluate, and react to academic experiences. However, to understand the role of self-confidence within this process, it is necessary to distinguish it from related concepts such as self-esteem and self-efficacy. Although these concepts are related, they are treated as distinct constructs in this study, with self-confidence representing the central concept under investigation.

Self-esteem refers to the level of appreciation individuals have toward themselves and is related to how learners perceive themselves as successful or unsuccessful language learners (Jayesh & Thomas, 2022). In contrast, self-confidence refers to individuals' belief in their own capabilities and skills, which may vary depending on the circumstances (Listyani, 2022). Within an EFL context, for example, students may experience a high level of confidence during writing activities while feeling less confident during speaking activities.

Self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs about their capacity to accomplish goals and perform specific tasks effectively. According to Bandura (1997), it involves magnitude, strength, and generality. Magnitude refers to the level of task difficulty individuals believe they can manage; strength concerns their persistence when facing challenges; and generality refers to the extent to which individuals perceive their capabilities as transferable across similar or different tasks. Therefore, writing self-efficacy should not be understood simply as the possession of a particular skill, but as individuals' beliefs about their ability to use that skill successfully.

These beliefs become particularly relevant when students experience emotional barriers during language learning. In this context, Krashen's (1982), affective filter hypothesis explains how language learning may be influenced not only by cognitive factors but also by affective factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence. These emotional factors can act as mental barriers that hinder language acquisition. During writing activities, students experiencing strong affective barriers may find it difficult to generate ideas or initiate a task because they perceive themselves as lacking the necessary knowledge or ability. For this reason, teachers can contribute to creating classroom environments in which students feel comfortable making mistakes and receiving constructive feedback from teachers and peers. Such environments may help learners recognize their strengths and weaknesses while supporting confidence and motivation during writing activities.

State of the Art

Writing difficulties in EFL contexts

Writing is considered a fundamental skill in language learning because it enables learners to communicate ideas, opinions, and experiences through written discourse. However, it is also frequently described as one of the most demanding skills for EFL learners. Writing requires students to generate ideas and organize them into coherent and understandable texts while simultaneously managing vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, coherence, and cohesion (Perumal & Ajit, 2020; Chicho, 2022). These demands make writing a complex process in which linguistic knowledge and the ability to organize ideas interact.

These challenges become particularly evident in EFL contexts, where learners are expected to produce texts in a language they are still developing. Difficulties may include limited linguistic resources, inappropriate vocabulary choices, problems with grammatical structures, and challenges in organizing ideas effectively (Kenta & Bosha, 2019). Learners may also rely on their first language

ge when planning or generating ideas, which can create additional difficulties when transferring those ideas into English. Therefore, writing difficulties should not be understood exclusively as problems related to grammar or vocabulary, but as part of a broader process involving linguistic knowledge, idea generation, and text organization.

The literature also suggests that writing development is influenced by the conditions under which students learn. Classroom support, learning materials, and opportunities for sustained writing practice may contribute to the development of stronger writing skills (Afsar & Jamal, 2022; Aldabbus & Almansouri, 2022; Aldayel et al., 2026). From this perspective, developing writing skills is not solely the learner's responsibility. It also depends on guided practice and learning experiences that allow students to construct, revise, and communicate ideas effectively in a foreign language.

Self-confidence and affective factors in writing

Although linguistic difficulties are frequently emphasized in the literature, writing is also associated with affective and contextual factors. Previous studies have examined challenges related to brainstorming, sentence organization, vocabulary use, paraphrasing, and information synthesis (Tardy, 2020; Afsar & Jamal, 2022; Aldabbus & Almansouri, 2022; Noori, 2020). However, these difficulties do not occur independently from learners' emotions, motivation, or perceptions of their own abilities.

Wijaya and Mbato (2020), distinguish between internal and external factors that may shape learners' experiences. Internal factors include characteristics such as motivation, personality, previous experience, and mother tongue, whereas external factors include teacher instruction, curriculum, classroom environment, and class size. Brown (2007), similarly presents language learning as a process influenced not only by linguistic limitations but also by affective, motivational, psychological, and educational conditions. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that students' responses to writing tasks emerge from the interaction of linguistic, personal, and contextual factors.

Within this interaction, self-confidence becomes particularly relevant. Students who perceive themselves as capable of completing a writing task may be more willing to participate, persist, and revise their work, whereas those with lower confidence may avoid writing activities or become overly concerned about negative evaluation. Mardiansyah (2018), reported a positive relationship between self-confidence and essay-writing achievement, while Akbari and Sahibzada (2020), highlighted the role of self-confidence in students' engagement with the learning process. Similarly, Vacalares et al. (2023), emphasize the importance of appropriate challenges and successful learning experiences in supporting students' confidence and motivation.

Therefore, writing difficulties cannot be explained exclusively through grammar and vocabulary. The literature suggests that motivation, self-confidence, emotional responses, and classroom expectations are also relevant to understanding how learners approach writing tasks. This pers-

pective supports the analysis of self-confidence not as an isolated factor, but as part of a broader network of affective and contextual influences.

Teacher assessment and feedback as external influences

Assessment and feedback represent important external influences on students' writing experiences. Assessment can provide information about students' progress and the extent to which they apply their knowledge in meaningful contexts (Rojas Preciado, 2022). In writing instruction, assessment may serve not only to evaluate a final product but also to guide students throughout the drafting and revision process. From this perspective, assessment becomes part of the learning process rather than merely a mechanism for assigning a grade.

Feedback is closely related to this formative function because it provides students with information about the strengths and weaknesses of their written work. Nazmillah et al. (2022), describe feedback as a strategy that can guide revision and help students identify aspects that require improvement. Similarly, Wardana et al. (2025), suggest that effective feedback can support students' continued effort and development. Consequently, feedback may influence not only how students revise their writing but also how they interpret their own progress as writers.

However, the effectiveness of feedback also depends on how students perceive and respond to it. Learners may be reluctant to engage with feedback when they fear judgment, feel uncomfortable with correction, or experience difficulties in their relationship with the teacher (Brandmo & Gamlem, 2025). This suggests that feedback should not be understood solely as information provided by the teacher; its value also depends on students' emotional responses and their willingness to use that information. Consequently, assessment and feedback may become relevant external factors in the development of students' self-confidence during writing activities.

Overall, the literature reviewed suggests that EFL writing difficulties emerge from the interaction of linguistic, affective, and contextual factors. Although grammar, vocabulary, organization, and writing practice remain important, learners' motivation, self-confidence, assessment experiences, and perceptions of feedback also appear to shape how they engage with writing tasks. Nevertheless, the literature considered in this study provides limited evidence regarding how these factors are perceived by high school students within the Ecuadorian EFL context. Examining the perspectives of both students and teachers may therefore provide a more contextualized understanding of the role of self-confidence in essay writing.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore students' perceptions of the role of self-confidence in EFL essay writing within a specific educational context. A qualitative

approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the factors associated with confidence during the writing process. The case study design allowed the researcher to examine these perceptions in depth within a private school in Riobamba, Ecuador.

Ethical Considerations and Authorization

Before data collection, authorization was obtained from the school authorities through a formal request. Information concerning the purpose of the study, data collection procedures, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation was provided in Spanish to facilitate participants' understanding.

Because the study involved high school students, written authorization to participate was obtained from both parents or legal guardians and the students. Participants were informed that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous and that their participation was voluntary. Students who were not enrolled in the final year of high school or who did not provide the required authorization were excluded from the study.

Participants and Participant Selection

The study was conducted at a private school in Riobamba, Ecuador. Seven students from the final year of high school participated in the focus group. The group consisted of five female and two male students, approximately 16 to 18 years old. This educational level was selected because students regularly engaged in the development of different language skills and completed writing activities such as essays, paragraphs, and articles.

Two English teachers working at the same institution and educational level also participated in the study. Both teachers held degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language and had approximately five to ten years of teaching experience.

The original study reported that the students were intentionally selected. However, because the specific procedure used to choose the seven participants was not documented, no additional selection criterion is claimed in the present description.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected through two instruments: a student focus group and semi-structured interviews with the two English teachers. The final focus group protocol consisted of six main open-ended questions and two follow-up prompts designed to explore students' perceptions of their self-confidence and writing experiences.

The teacher interview protocol also consisted of six main questions and two follow-up prompts aimed at identifying factors associated with students' confidence in writing from the teachers' perspectives. The use of open-ended questions allowed participants to describe their experiences and perceptions while giving the researcher the opportunity to explore relevant aspects that emerged during the conversations.

Data Collection Procedure

The student focus group was conducted in a room at the school after participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Based on the students' language preferences, the session was conducted in Spanish and lasted approximately 30 minutes.

The two English teachers were interviewed individually at the institution. Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately 10 minutes and was conducted in English in the presence of an interviewer and a note-taker.

The sessions were recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis. Participants' identities were protected through a coding system. Teachers were identified using the letter T followed by a number (e.g., T1 and T2), whereas students were identified using the letter S followed by a number (e.g., S1 and S2).

The student focus group was conducted in Spanish and subsequently transcribed in the same language. Selected excerpts used to report the findings were translated into English by the researcher for inclusion in the manuscript, with attention to preserving the original meaning of participants' responses.

Data Analysis

The recorded data were transcribed before analysis. Fillers, false starts, repetitions, and incomplete statements that did not contribute to the meaning of participants' responses were omitted to improve readability while preserving the meaning of their accounts.

The transcripts were subsequently analyzed through a coding and categorization process supported by ATLAS.ti 24. Recurring patterns in students' and teachers' responses were identified and grouped into broader categories related to self-confidence and writing.

For example, responses concerning fear of making mistakes, emotional state, and willingness to participate were associated with confidence and motivation, whereas comments concerning teacher correction, revision, and peer responses were grouped under feedback.

This analytical process resulted in five main categories: self-confidence, motivation, assessment, feedback, and English language proficiency. These categories represented the most recurrent and relevant themes identified in participants' accounts concerning self-confidence and writing.

Triangulation

Methodological triangulation was used to compare the information obtained from the student focus group and the teachers' semi-structured interviews. The two data sources were cross-checked to identify similarities and differences in participants' perspectives and to provide a broader understanding of the factors associated with students' self-confidence in writing (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012).

Rather than relying on a single source of information, this process allowed the perspectives of students and teachers to be examined in relation to one another.

Validation and Pilot Testing

Before data collection, both instruments were reviewed by two teachers from other institutions to assess the clarity and relevance of the questions. Their feedback focused primarily on similarities among questions, the number of items, wording, and the need to merge related questions or introduce follow-up prompts. Based on this feedback, the instruments were revised before their final application.

The initial student focus group protocol contained 12 main questions, several of which addressed similar aspects of the relationship between self-confidence and writing. For example, questions concerning the relationship between self-confidence and writing skills overlapped with questions exploring how confidence affected students' writing experiences. These questions were reorganized or converted into follow-up prompts to reduce repetition and encourage more focused responses. Consequently, the final student focus group protocol consisted of six main questions and two follow-up prompts.

Similarly, the initial teacher interview protocol contained 11 questions. Background questions that did not contribute directly to the study objectives were removed, while questions addressing overlapping aspects of students' confidence in writing were combined. As a result, the final teacher interview protocol consisted of six main questions and two follow-up prompts.

Results

This section presents the findings obtained from the student focus group and the semi-structured interviews with the two English teachers. The analysis resulted in five main categories: self-confidence, motivation, assessment, feedback, and English language proficiency. These categories represent the recurring themes identified in participants' accounts regarding students' confidence during writing activities.

Self-Confidence

The findings indicated that participants associated self-confidence with students' emotional state, preparation, perseverance, and perceptions of their own abilities. Both teachers and students described confidence as relevant to how learners approached writing tasks.

T1 explained that students' emotional state and their belief in their ability to complete a task could influence their writing experience. According to T1, students may perform differently when they "feel quite good in terms of emotions" and believe that they are capable of completing the task.

Students expressed similar perceptions. S1 described self-confidence as being able to complete an activity for which one feels prepared and to accomplish it successfully. Similarly, S6 associated confidence with "feeling secure," recognizing personal "weaknesses and strengths," and "not giving up."

S3 emphasized the importance of feeling secure about one's own actions, stating, "A confident person is sure of what he is doing and nothing that he thinks or is on the outside affects his actions."

However, students also described confidence as variable rather than constant. S7 explained, "People have moments of low confidence too. I think I am wrong and just do not trust myself to be good at writing."

Overall, participants described self-confidence as a changing perception connected to emotional state, preparation, perseverance, and beliefs about their own writing abilities.

Motivation

Motivation emerged as another recurring factor associated with students' confidence in writing. The teachers described motivation as related to students' willingness to engage in writing activities and to the effort they invested in completing them. They also noted that motivation could vary according to students' emotional and mental states.

T1 emphasized the importance of teacher-student rapport, stating, "Not all of the students are going to be motivated, but as a teacher somehow you have to establish positive rapport."

Similarly, T2 referred to the importance of creating "motivational situations" to help students understand that "mistakes can improve over time."

Students also connected motivation with confidence and effort. S2 explained that "being motivated and trusting in ourselves makes us give much more of ourselves [...] and give a much better product in the end."

Nevertheless, students reported that motivation was not stable and could be affected by emotional, personal, or academic circumstances. S5 explained, “Sometimes I am not feeling good or feel sad on that day [...] I just don’t feel like writing.”

These responses indicate that participants perceived motivation as closely connected to confidence, effort, emotional state, and willingness to engage in writing tasks.

Assessment

Assessment was also identified as an important aspect of students’ writing experiences. Both teachers referred to formative and peer assessment as practices used during writing activities. Rather than focusing exclusively on summative assessment, they emphasized the importance of providing guidance throughout the drafting process.

T2 explained that “while they are doing this process the teacher should provide the necessary guidance for letting them know if they are writing well or not.”

The same teacher also described peer assessment as a practice that may encourage students to learn from one another and develop greater autonomy. According to T2, this type of collaborative assessment can make students “feel more comfortable when grading their writings.”

However, participants also identified limitations associated with peer assessment, particularly when students had different academic backgrounds. T1 explained that peer assessment was “not too advisable, specifically if you’re facing with students with different academic backgrounds” and emphasized the importance of teacher guidance when evaluating written work.

Students also reported mixed experiences with peer assessment. S2 stated, “Some classmates don’t take the task seriously.” Similarly, S5 recalled receiving a general comment without sufficient explanation: “They wrote ‘Need improvement’ at the top of my paragraph. I did not know what I was doing wrong.”

Assessment experiences were also associated with students’ perceptions of their own writing ability. S7 explained, “[...] when I saw the results of the term exam [...], they were the worst, then it affected my confidence a lot [...] I needed to improve a lot [...].”

These accounts show that participants perceived assessment not only as a way of evaluating written work but also as an experience associated with their perceptions of progress and confidence.

Feedback

Feedback emerged as another relevant category. Teachers described feedback as a strategy that could help students identify errors, revise their written work, and recognize areas for improvement.

T2 emphasized the importance of revision and guidance by referring to the value of “asking them to write once again and helping them notice their mistakes [...]”.

However, T1 noted that students were not always willing to accept revision, explaining, “[...] students are not, like, predisposed to accept revision, and probably this might actually become a problem [...] it’s like you are not going to improve your write-ups in the end.”

Students generally described feedback as useful when it provided specific information about how they could improve. S1 explained that comments were valuable when they helped students recognize “which aspects you are failing.”

S5 emphasized the importance of receiving both guidance and encouragement during the writing process:

It is necessary to have a person next to you who tells you that you are doing wrong [...] and gives you words of motivation, so to speak, teaches you or guides you along the path of how you should improve that [...]. (S5)

Although some students reported feeling nervous about teacher correction, they generally expressed a preference for teacher feedback over peer feedback, particularly when they needed support with vocabulary, grammar, or organization of ideas. S2 stated, “I prefer that the teacher corrects me [...] I feel scared of what he might say but I try to ask as many questions as possible [...]”.

Similarly, S3 explained, “[...] sometimes my classmates also don’t know how to say something in English, so I ask the teacher [...] mainly vocabulary words or if my thesis statement is correct [...]”.

This preference was also observed by T2, who stated, “I have noticed they preferred my feedback rather than their peers [...]”.

Overall, participants viewed feedback as valuable when it provided clear guidance, helped students identify areas for improvement, and supported the revision process.

English Language Proficiency

English language proficiency emerged as another factor associated with students’ confidence during writing tasks. Both students and teachers connected confidence with students’ perceived ability to use vocabulary and grammatical structures and to organize ideas clearly in English.

T2 explained that some students experienced difficulties expressing or organizing their ideas and emphasized the importance of linguistic knowledge, stating, “[...] when you have a good knowledge of the language, you can express the ideas [...] sometimes they use Spanish and then English”.

Students reported similar experiences. Several participants explained that ideas sometimes occurred to them first in Spanish and that difficulties arose when they attempted to express those ideas in English. S1 stated, “[...] the idea comes to my mind, but in Spanish, and it is difficult for me to translate it into English [...] because I don’t know how to say it in English”.

S4 similarly reported being able to connect ideas in Spanish but experiencing difficulties applying the same process in English.

S3 also described difficulties related to vocabulary, explaining that “[...] it is difficult for me to know the meaning of the words in order to create ideas and paragraphs [...]”.

These accounts indicate that participants associated confidence in writing with their perceived ability to access vocabulary, use grammatical structures, and organize ideas in English.

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that students’ self-confidence in EFL writing is shaped by the interaction of internal and external factors rather than by a single condition. Participants associated confidence with emotional state, motivation, assessment experiences, feedback, and English language proficiency. These findings support the view that self-confidence should not be understood as an isolated characteristic, but as a dynamic perception that may change according to students’ experiences and the context in which writing takes place. This interpretation is consistent with Bandura’s (1986), Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes the interaction between personal beliefs, behavior, and environmental conditions. It also aligns with Wijaya and Mbato (2020), who highlight the relevance of both internal and external factors in learners’ perceptions of their own abilities.

Regarding the first research question, motivation emerged as an important internal factor associated with students’ confidence during writing activities. Participants connected motivation with effort, perseverance, willingness to write, and emotional state. This finding is consistent with Dhanya and Alamelu (2019), who identify motivation as an important factor in the development of writing skills. The participants’ accounts also suggest that motivation is not stable, since it may vary according to personal, emotional, and academic circumstances. In this sense, students’ willingness to engage in writing appears to depend not only on their linguistic knowledge but also on how they feel about the task and about their own ability to complete it successfully. This relationship reinforces the importance of considering confidence and motivation as interconnected rather than independent factors.

Assessment also emerged as an external factor associated with students’ perceptions of their writing abilities. Both teachers and students described assessment as an experience that may influence how learners interpret their own progress. The teachers emphasized the value of formative and peer assessment, while students reported that negative assessment experiences could reduce their confidence. This finding is consistent with Ismail et al. (2022), who discuss the role of for-

mative assessment in students' motivation, attitudes, anxiety, and self-regulation. At the same time, participants' concerns about peer assessment suggest that its effectiveness may depend on students' knowledge, classroom dynamics, and trust in their classmates' ability to provide useful evaluations. Therefore, assessment may contribute to confidence when it provides meaningful guidance, but it may also generate uncertainty when students perceive the evaluation as unclear or unreliable.

Feedback was closely connected to assessment but emerged as a distinct factor in participants' writing experiences. Both students and teachers emphasized that feedback was particularly valuable when it helped learners recognize errors and identify specific ways to improve their writing. This finding is consistent with Wardana et al. (2025), who highlight the role of teacher feedback in writing achievement, self-efficacy, and self-regulation, and with Nazmillah et al. (2022), who describe feedback as a strategy that can support revision and improvement. The results also suggest that feedback is most useful when students are willing to engage with it. This interpretation is supported by Brandmo and Gamlem (2025), who indicate that students' perceptions of feedback influence how they respond to it.

An important finding was students' preference for teacher feedback over peer feedback. Although participants recognized that classmates could provide support, they generally perceived teacher feedback as more reliable, particularly when they needed assistance with vocabulary, grammar, or organization of ideas. This finding partially contrasts with research emphasizing the benefits of peer feedback. Zhang (2022), for example, highlights the potential of collaborative feedback to promote affective and cognitive engagement, while Winstone and Carless (2020), discuss the value of feedback processes that encourage active learner participation. In the present study, however, students appeared to place greater trust in teacher feedback. This difference may be related to their perception that teachers possess greater linguistic and pedagogical expertise, especially when addressing specific writing problems. Therefore, the effectiveness of peer feedback may depend on the level of confidence students have in their classmates' ability to provide accurate and useful guidance.

English language proficiency also emerged as a factor associated with students' self-confidence in writing. Participants linked confidence with their perceived ability to use vocabulary, grammatical structures, and organize ideas effectively in English. Students reported that ideas often emerged first in Spanish and that difficulties occurred when they attempted to express those ideas in English. This finding is consistent with Bisriyah (2022) and Nabu and Pakaya (2022), who identify linguistic limitations as an important source of difficulty in essay writing. It also aligns with Li and Pei (2024), who discuss challenges related to language skills in EFL contexts. These findings suggest that students' confidence may decrease not because they lack ideas, but because they perceive that they do not possess sufficient linguistic resources to communicate those ideas effectively in English.

Regarding the second research question, students perceived the influence of internal and external factors as interconnected. Motivation, emotional state, assessment, feedback, and linguistic knowledge were not described as independent conditions. Rather, participants' accounts suggest that these factors interacted during the writing process. For instance, limited vocabulary could reduce confidence, while supportive feedback could help students identify areas for improvement and encourage them to continue writing. Similarly, negative assessment experiences could weaken confidence, whereas constructive guidance could support students' willingness to revise their work. This interaction reinforces the idea that self-confidence in writing is context-dependent and may change across different tasks and learning experiences.

In relation to the third research question, teachers described self-confidence as relevant to the way students approached writing activities. Their responses suggest that students who perceived themselves as capable were more willing to engage with writing tasks, accept guidance, and continue revising their work, whereas lower confidence could be associated with hesitation or avoidance. However, the findings should not be interpreted as demonstrating a direct causal relationship between self-confidence and writing performance. Rather, they indicate that teachers and students perceived confidence as one component within a broader set of affective, linguistic, and classroom-related conditions.

Overall, the findings indicate that self-confidence in EFL essay writing is best understood as a dynamic and context-sensitive perception. The study suggests that students' confidence is associated with how they feel, how they evaluate their own linguistic resources, how they experience assessment, and how they interpret feedback from teachers and peers. From this perspective, supporting students' confidence requires more than encouraging positive attitudes. It also involves providing clear guidance, meaningful opportunities for revision, supportive assessment practices, and classroom conditions in which students can view mistakes as part of the learning process.

Conclusion

This study explored the role of self-confidence in EFL essay writing among final-year high school students at a private institution in Riobamba, Ecuador. The findings suggest that self-confidence was not perceived as an isolated factor in students' writing experiences, but as a dynamic and context-dependent perception associated with emotional state, motivation, assessment experiences, feedback, and English language proficiency. From the participants' perspectives, writing involved not only linguistic and cognitive demands but also affective and classroom-related conditions that shaped how students approached writing tasks.

Students reported that fear of failure, low motivation, limited vocabulary, difficulties organizing ideas, and negative assessment experiences could reduce their confidence during writing activities. At the same time, teacher guidance, supportive feedback, and opportunities to revise their work were perceived as helpful in sustaining students' willingness to continue writing and

learn from mistakes. Teachers similarly described self-confidence as related to the way students approached writing tasks and responded to guidance. These findings highlight the importance of considering students' perceptions of their own abilities alongside linguistic knowledge when supporting EFL writing development.

This study contributes a context-specific qualitative perspective on how students and teachers understand self-confidence in relation to EFL essay writing. In particular, it shows that confidence is intertwined with motivation, assessment, feedback, and perceived linguistic resources rather than functioning as a separate or fixed characteristic. These findings may help educators recognize the importance of creating supportive writing environments in which students receive clear guidance, meaningful feedback, and opportunities to revise their work without perceiving mistakes solely as indicators of failure.

The study also presents several limitations. The sample was limited to seven students and two English teachers from a single private institution, which restricts the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. In addition, the study focused on participants' perceptions and did not directly measure writing performance or establish causal relationships between self-confidence and writing outcomes. The analysis was also limited to the factors that emerged from the participants' responses within this particular context.

Future research could examine self-confidence and writing experiences using larger and more diverse samples across different educational levels and institutions. Further studies could also explore additional factors that may be associated with students' confidence in writing and examine how these perceptions relate to changes in writing performance over time.

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