The Relationship between EFL Students' Writing Motivation, Self-Perceived Writing Intelligence, and Attitude toward Written Feedback

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Abstract
The study of individual difference variables in the realm of written feedback is one of the significant lines of research which has been reinvigorated in the last few years. These variables are believed to affect both students' engagement with feedback and their writing improvement. The present correlational study investigated the relationship between EFL students' implicit theories of writing intelligence, writing motivation and attitudes toward written feedback. In so doing, 110 intermediate English language learners took three questionnaires, namely Implicit Theories of Writing Intelligence, Orientation toward Corrective Feedback, and Writing Motivation. The findings of the present study indicated that EFL students' incremental theory of writing intelligence positively correlated with their writing motivation and feedback seeking orientation. On the other hand, EFL students' entity theory of writing intelligence negatively correlated with their writing motivation and positively correlated with their feedback avoiding orientation. In other words, those EFL learners who believed in the plasticity of their cognitive abilities were of higher writing motivation and feedback seeking orientation levels than those participants who believed that their writing ability was a fixed entity, which could not be extended.

Keywords: Attitude toward written feedback, Implicit theories of intelligence, Teacher feedback, Writing motivation

INTRODUCTION

Corrective feedback is an indispensable part of first and second language writing classes throughout the world. It has received significant attention by students, instructors, and researchers. However, the controversy over the use of this intervention and its dynamics does not seem to be

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an interminable one. The debate over feedback was initiated in the 1960s, when behaviorists found errors as unforgivable sins. They believed that errors had to be corrected once they occurred since they would form students' habits. However, the following years witnessed the ideas of those like Chomsky and Krashen who found corrective feedback ineffective in improving learners' writ-

ing ability. They find the negative evidence provided by corrective feedback of little or no use.

In a similar case in the last twenty years, two opposing ideas have stood up for and against corrective feedback in second language writing programs. In the mid-1990s, Truscott (1996) initiated a hot debate about the efficiency of corrective feedback. He argued that no strong empirical support was present to justify the use of corrective feedback. Truscott also found corrective feedback harmful since it could lead to students' higher levels of anxiety and, in turn, lower levels of motivation. He also argued that students might employ less complex structures in an attempt not to receive corrective feedback.

However, the counterarguments are not scarce. Ferris (1999) criticized Truscott's argumentation against corrective feedback. She cast doubt on Truscott's method of reviewing previous studies and his definition of corrective feedback. Other studies of Ferris (1999, 2002, 2004) attempted to show how corrective feedback provided through writing teachers helped second

language learners improve their writing ability. These studies were followed with a series of research (Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Hoomanfard & Rahimi, 2018; Sheen, 2007; Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009; Takashima, 2008). These studies among many others have formed a substantial empirical support for the usefulness of corrective feedback in improving second language writing ability.

After the establishment of the effectiveness of teacher corrective feedback, more recent studies started to investigate different factors that could affect the efficacy of teacher feedback. Subsequent studies focused on what to correct and how to correct. The focus of these studies was on feedback provider, errors that should be ignored or focused, the time of providing feedback, and the language in which comments are provided (Ellis, 2012; Hedge, 2000). Other researchers provided a general framework for researching and practicing corrective feedback. To name the most oft-cited scholar, Ellis (2010) provided a framework for researching corrective feedback (Figure 1).
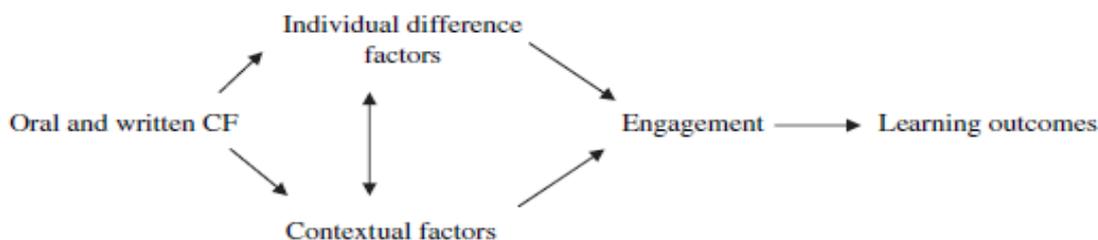

Figure 1. Framework for investigating corrective feedback (Ellis, 2010, p. 337)

In the framework proposed by Ellis (2010), it is suggested that the corrective feedback provided by an agent goes through different contextual factors and individual difference factors. The confluence of the content of feedback, individual difference factors and contextual factors forms the students' engagement with the feedback, which, in turn, can lead to learners' outcomes. The mediating factors at the level of contextual and individual can determine the differential effects of the same set of comments on different individuals. In other words, the knowledge of the mediating factors can help us improve our

practices to reach higher degrees of learning.

Contextual factors include the setting in which leaning takes place (e.g., EFL, ESL) and microfactors which deal with the immediate environment of receiving feedback. Ellis (2010) argues that disregarding the contextual factors from feedback studies can misguide us. Similarly, Goldstein (2005) has complained about the non-contextual, non-social nature of feedback studies. Individual differences variables also affect the process of students' engagement and leaning. Ellis posits that learners' individual differences variables such as age, language aptitude, memory,

learning style, personality, motivation, language anxiety, and learner beliefs can mediate the effects of the provided input and students' engagement with corrective feedback.

Three mediating variables which the literature has proposed to affect second/foreign language learners' success in writing classes are their implicit theories of intelligence, attitudes toward written feedback, and writing motivation. Implicit theories of intelligence have recently been employed by Waller and Papi (2017) in second language writing studies. Implicit theories of intelligence refer to the extent to which individuals believe in the plasticity of their cognitive abilities. It is argued that individuals are inclined to be of either entity or incremental theory of intelligence. While, the former group believe that their cognitive abilities are fixed and cannot be extended, the latter one think their cognitive abilities are flexible and can be extended with effort. Several prior studies (e.g., Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Braten&Stromso, 2004; Spicer, 2017) have investigated the role of this variable in educational success. This variable is studied to examine whether there is a meaningful relationship between EFL students' writing motivation and attitudes toward written feedback.

Motivation is reported to be a domain-specific phenomenon (Zhang &Guo, 2012). Accordingly, second language learners' motivation in a skill might be different from their motivation in other skills. This premise has encouraged researcher to conduct studies on motivation and different skills to deepen our understanding of the role of motivation in second language writing process. Writing, as the most challenging language skill for second language learners (Hyland, 2003), seems to be a note-worthy area of investigating students' motivation. Several prior studies have investigated the role of motivation in first and second language writing. They have shown that students' motivational challenges can hinder the process of writing ability achievement (Hidi&Boscolo, 2006). In the same line, the present study wishes to investigate the way EFL students' writing mo-

tivation is related to their implicit theories of intelligence and attitudes toward feedback.

Prior empirical studies have investigated the relationship between these individual difference variables and students' writing ability separately. For instance, Zimmerman and Risemberg (1997) found that students' writing motivation determined the extent to which a learner allocated time and effort in different steps of writing (planning, revising, and reviewing). Some other studies have also found a positive relationship between students' motivation level and their writing ability (e.g. Ekholm, Zumbrunn, & Conklin, 2015; Graham, Kiuhara, Harris, & Fishman, 2017; Pajares, Valinate, & Cheong, 2007; Sasaki, 2011; Troria et al., 2012). The review of the literature showed the positive relationship between students' writing motivation and writing ability.

The study on implicit theories of intelligence in educational settings has been started in the late 1990s. Some of pioneering empirical studies (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Robins & Pal, 1998) found that students' incremental implicit theory of intelligence positively correlated with their academic achievement and students' entity implicit theory of intelligence was negatively correlated with their grades. In the same vein, Leondari and Gialmas (2002) found that students' implicit beliefs were positively and significantly correlated with their educational performance.

Two studies have been conducted on the relationship between students' implicit theories of intelligence and their attitudes toward teacher feedback. In the first study, Blackwell, Trzesniewski, and Dweck (2007) found that those who were of high levels of incremental intelligence welcomed receiving negative feedback, worked harder and improved more than those entity theorists who were not satisfied with receiving negative feedback as they thought they had already reached their ability and could not step forward. They found that the provision of comments was a fruitless task that had to be removed from the agenda. In another study, Waller and Papi (2017) investigated the relationship be-

tween students' implicit theory of intelligence and writing motivation, and orientation toward corrective feedback in the realm of second language writing. The participants of their study included English learners of both genders from an ESL context. They were selected from a large university in the United States. They rated their own English language ability, and the majority of them were in the upper-intermediate and intermediate levels. Their study revealed that there was a significant positive correlation between students' incremental intelligence and their writing motivation, and orientation toward corrective feedback. As reviewed here, scant attention has been paid to the students' implicit theories of intelligence in the area of teacher feedback.

A few more studies have delved into the issue of students' attitudes toward corrective feedback and have found students' positive attitudes toward the usefulness of teacher corrective feedback (Baker & Montgomery, 2007; Carless, 2006; Cohen, 1987). In more recent years, a couple of studies have investigated students' attitudes toward corrective feedback. Rizki (2014) has investigated EFL students' attitudes toward corrective feedback. Their study indicated that students had a positive attitude toward teacher corrective feedback. It also helped second language learners improve their writing ability. Rustania (2016) also investigated the effect of teacher corrective feedback and examined students' attitudes toward it. The findings of his study indicated that corrective feedback significantly improved the writing ability of the participants; moreover, students had positive attitudes toward corrective feedback. Another finding of his study was that corrective feedback led to students' higher levels of writing motivation.

This brief review of the individual difference variables revealed that there are still niches in the literature that can be occupied with further studies. The majority of writing motivation studies were focused merely on students' general writing ability and little attention has been paid to the way students' writing motivation can affect students' engagement with feedback. Another gap in the literature is the investigation of how EFL students' implicit theories of intelligence can directly and indirectly affect students' attitudinal engagement with teacher feedback. The investigation of implicit theories of intelligence is a novel line of research in second language writing studies. The scrutiny of the potential effects of this underlying variable can help us prepare students cognitively to benefit from one of the precious mediating factors, which is teacher written feedback.

The present study attempts to investigate the relationship between three underexplored individual difference variables in feedback studies. This study is of significance at the level of theory as it can help us gain a more comprehensive picture of the factors affecting EFL students' attitudinal engagement with teacher feedback. The investigation of these factors may partially explain students' differential levels of engagement with feedback provided by a single instructor, which has been one of the black boxes in feedback studies. The findings can help us understand possible debilitative factors in acquiring second language writing ability and engaging with teacher feedback and let us move toward finding solutions for them. The findings of the present study can help researchers find the variables which can affect the process of acquiring second language writing, and permit practitioners to understand about the roots of their students' reluctance to attend teacher feedback, which is a significant factor in the success of feedback implementation. The present study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' self-perceived intelligence and their orientation toward written corrective feedback?

2. Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' self-perceived intelligence and their writing motivation?

3. Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' writing motivation and their orientation toward written corrective feedback?

4. Does gender mediate the relationship between writing motivation, orientation toward written corrective feedback, and self-perceived intelligence?

METHODS

The present study follows a quantitative correlational research design. As indicated in Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorensen (2006), correlational research gathers data from individuals on two or more variables and then seeks to determine if the variables are statistically related.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants of the present study included 110 EFL learners. Both male (N=54, 49.09%) and female (N=56, 50.90%) students participated in this study. These students were enrolled in eight General English language intact classes. The students within the age range of 15 to 29 years participated in this study. The participants were selected based on convenience sampling method from an English language institute in Tehran, Iran. Although the institute had categorized these students into intermediate level, the researcher employed Oxford Placement Test (OPT, Allan, 2004) to assess students' proficiency level. The results showed that the participants were all intermediate English language learners (M=142.85, SD= 2.82). All scores were within the range of 120-149, which equals B1 and B2 level in CEFR (Council of Europe Framework or Reference, 2001). The native language of all participants was Persian (Farsi).

INSTRUMENTS

Different questionnaires were employed in the present study to collect the required data to answer the research questions.

Implicit Theories of Writing Intelligence

In order to check students' entity and incremental theories of writing intelligence, a questionnaire developed by Waller and Papi (2017) was employed. This questionnaire includes five items and is developed based on the Dweck's (2000)

general intelligence questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the incremental theory of intelligence level was .82, and that of the entity theory of intelligence was .71, which according to Pallant (2007), are acceptable.

Orientation toward Corrective Feedback

In order to check participants' orientation toward corrective feedback, a questionnaire of 13 items, developed by Waller and Papi (2017), was employed. This questionnaire deals with the way participants think about corrective feedback and the extent to which they are interested in corrective feedback practice. This questionnaire consists of two main factors of feedback seeking and feedback avoiding beliefs. As their names suggest, the former part deals with the extent to which the participants were cognitively and affectively eager to receive feedback on their texts and the latter part examines students' aversion to receiving corrective feedback on their texts. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the feedback seeking section was .94, and that of feedback avoiding orientation was .86.

Writing Motivation

The participants' writing motivation was assessed by the use of a writing motivation questionnaire. This questionnaire includes seven items and was developed by Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009). This questionnaire includes items on students' intended efforts for writing in second language, desire to write in second language, and second language writing motivational intensity. The Cronbach's alpha reliability for checking the internal consistency of the items of this questionnaire in this study was .91.

Oxford Placement test

In order to check second language learners' English language proficiency, Oxford Placement Test (Allan, 2004) was employed. This test includes 200 items which are in the form of multiple-choice items. Different sections of this test are listening, structure, and vocabulary. The time limit of this test is 100 minutes. The validity and

reliability of this test have been well-established (Allan, 2004).

Procedure

Step 1. The researcher referred to the head of the institute and asked for her permission for data collection. She described the research process to her and assured her that the natural flow of the classes would not be contaminated.

Step 2. In order to collect the data, the participants were determined and contacted for their consent to participate in the study. All questionnaires were completed anonymously.

Step 3. The participants answered the questions in the classroom. They had 35 minutes to provide response to these questions. The researcher was present during the data collection procedure to answer any possible questions.

Data analysis

Cronbach's alpha and principal component analysis were employed to examine the reliability and validity of the employed questionnaires. The data collected in this study were analyzed quantitatively. The questionnaire results were correlated by the use of Pearson correlation procedure. In order to check possible differences between male and female students with regard to their writing motivation, orientation toward written corrective feedback, and implicit theories of intelligence, independent t test were employed.

RESULTS
Principal component analysis of measures

The findings of the factor analysis indicated that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index was .848, which was higher than the acceptable value of 0.5. Furthermore, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (242.2, p<.05). Two main factors were extracted which were entity theory of writing intelligence (with the loadings of .909, .792, and .517) and incremental theory of writing intelligence (with the loadings of .889 and .532). With regard to the writing motivation measure, all items were assessing one single factor, which was students' writing motivation (with the loadings of .783, .832, .831, .789, .859, 772, and .807). The findings of the factor analysis indicated that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index was .89, which was higher than the acceptable value of 0.5. Furthermore, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (445.04, p<.05). There were two main factors in the attitude measure. Seven items (with the loadings of .807, .781, .637, .760, .759, .855, and .745) assessed students' level of feedback seeking and six items (with the loadings of .718, .723, .540, .782, .383, and .749) examined students' level of feedback avoidance. The findings of the factor analysis indicated that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index was .94, which was higher than the acceptable value of 0.5. Furthermore, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (109.4, p<.05).

Questionnaire Findings

The second set of inferential statistics deals with the relationship between EFL learners' implicit theories of intelligence and their orientation toward written corrective feedback. Table 1 below shows the relationship between these two variables.

Table 1.
Correlation between EFL Learners' Implicit Theories of Writing Intelligence and their Orientation toward Written Corrective Feedback

	Feedback seeking	Feedback avoiding
Entity theory of writing intelligence	-.712 .000	.687 .000
Incremental theory of writing intelligence	.770* .000	-.694* .000

* Correlation is significant at the .001 level (2-tailed)

As provided in Table 1, the correlation between the participants' entity theory of writing intelligence and feedback seeking was negative and significant (r=-.712, p<.001). Likewise, the correlation between the students' incremental theory of writing intelligence and feedback avoiding attitude was negative and significant (r= -.694, p<.001). On the other hand, there was a significant positive correlation between students' incremental theory of writing intelligence and feedback seeking beliefs (r=.770, p<.001). Furthermore, the correlation between the participants' entity theory of writing intelligence and feedback avoiding beliefs was positive and significant (r= .687, p<.001).

Investigating the relationship between EFL learners' implicit theories of intelligence and their writing motivation was another part of the present study. In so doing, Pearson Correlation was employed to check how these variables were related; the result of this correlation is provided in Table 2.

Table 2.
Correlation between EFL Learners' Implicit Theories of Writing Intelligence and their Writing Motivation

	Writing motivation
Entity theory of writing intelligence	-.722* .000
Incremental theory of writing intelligence	.702* .000

* Correlation is significant at the .001 level (2-tailed)

According to Table 2, there was a negative and significant correlation between students' entity theory of writing intelligence and writing motivation (r= -.722, p<.001). On the other hand, there was a positive and significant relationship between EFL students' incremental theory of writing intelligence and their writing motivation (r= .702, p<.001).

Another objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between EFL students' writing motivation and their orientation toward written corrective feedback. Table 4.13 shows the results of this relationship.

Table 3.
Correlation between EFL Learners' Writing Motivation and their Orientation toward Written Corrective Feedback

	Writing motivation
Feedback seeking	.814* .000
Feedback avoiding	- .864* .000

* Correlation is significant at the .001 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 indicates that there was a positive and significant correlation between EFL students' writing motivation and their feedback seeking attitudes (r=.814, p<.001). On the other hand, there was a negative and significant correlation between students' writing motivation and their feedback avoiding attitudes (r=-.864, p<.001).

The last part of the data analysis dealt with the examination of the significance of the difference between EFL male and female students' levels of implicit theories of writing intelligence, writing motivation, and attitudes toward corrective feedback. To do so, several t-tests were run. The results of these inferential measures are provided in Table 4.

Table 4.
Difference between EFL Male and Female Students' Levels of Implicit Theories of Writing Intelligence, Writing Motivation, and Attitudes toward Corrective Feedback

		Mean	SD	t	sig
Entity theory of writing intelligence	Male	11.98	3.55	.950	.344
	Female	11.33	3.53		
Incremental theory of writing intelligence	Male	7.07	2.31	.977	.331
	Female	7.50	2.25		
Writing motivation	Male	23.40	6.44	.573	.568
	Female	24.14	6.98		

Feedback seeking attitude	Male	20.11	7.49	.665	.507
	Female	21.05	7.36		
Feedback avoiding attitude	Male	25.11	5.18	.506	.614
	Female	24.58	5.60		

As indicated in Table 4, there was no significant difference between male and female students with regard to their entity theory of writing intelligence (t= .950, p<.05), incremental theory of writing intelligence (t= .977, p<.05), writing motivation (t= .573, p<.05), feedback seeking attitude (t= .665, p<.05), and feedback avoiding attitude (t=.506, p<.05).

Discussion
The first research question of the present study addressed the relationship between students' implicit theories of writing intelligence and their attitudes toward written corrective feedback. The findings of this study indicated that Iranian students' entity theory of writing intelligence was positively correlated with their feedback avoiding attitudes. Similarly, the participants' incremental theory of writing intelligence was positively correlated with students' feedback seeking attitudes. These findings suggest that the more students think their intelligence is malleable, the more they are willing to receive corrective feedback. These findings corroborate with those of the previous studies which found that students' implicit theories of intelligence can affect their educational processes and products in the short and long run (e.g., Butterfield &Mangels, 2003; De Castella & Byrne, 2015; Dweck&Sorich, 1999).

The findings of this study suggest that those students who believed that they could extend their general and writing intelligence had a more positive attitude toward written corrective feedback. Bandura (2006) argues that students' self-assessment of their capabilities and the malleability of their capabilities can function as a powerful predictor of their goals, attributions, and academic performance. Dweck (1999) states that when students do not believe in the plasticity of their capabilities, they find the provided instructions irrelevant and pointless since they believe that the instruction cannot influence their knowledge or

ability. Similarly, the results of the present study showed that those who were of higher levels of entity theory of intelligence were less inclined to receive instruction in the form of feedback.

The second research question of this study dealt with the relationship between EFL students' implicit theories of writing intelligence and their writing motivation. The findings of the present study indicated that students' entity theory of writing intelligence was negatively correlated with their writing motivation. Furthermore, their incremental theory of writing intelligence was positively correlated with students' writing motivation. Previous studies have also found that students' implicit theories of intelligence related significantly with their motivation (Butterfield &Mangels, 2003; Dweck, 2008; Dweck&Sorich, 1999). De Castella and Byrne (2015) state that students' self-theories of intelligence can significantly influence their motivation. Waller and Papi (2017) have also found the significance of students' implicit theories on their motivation to learn. Waller (2015) states that those students who are of a high level of entity theory of intelligence start a course with a belief that their abilities are fixed. They either believe that they are proficient enough that they do not need any type of instruction to move forward, or they feel they are incompetent learners who cannot extend their abilities. This belief can influence students' motivation to learn. Those who are of an entity theory of intelligence are less motivated to learn since they find it a pointless practice. On the other hand, those who believe that their abilities are incremental are more motivated to learn since they believe that the instruction can extend their knowledge or ability. This can affect their subsequent practice, which in the present study is students' attitude toward corrective feedback.

The third research question of this study pertained to the relationship between students' writing motivation and their attitudes toward written

corrective feedback. The results of the present study indicated that EFL students' writing motivation was positively correlated with their feedback seeking and was negatively correlated with their feedback avoiding beliefs. Prior studies (Butterfield &Mangels, 2003; Dweck, 2008; Grant &Dweck, 2003; Henderson &Dweck, 1990) have shown that students' implicit theories of intelligence affected their motivation to engage in the process of learning. Aronson, et al. (2002) found that students with a high level of incremental theory of intelligence were more motivated to engage in the process of learning; they participated more actively in the process of learning in classes and received higher scores. Bandura (2006) and Kormos (2012) have argued that when students have high self-efficacy beliefs, they are more motivated to engage in the process of learning. When students are of a high level of writing motivation, they engage more actively with their teachers' feedback (as an instance of instructional tool) to extend their knowledge.

The last research question of this study investigated possible differences between male and female students' implicit theories of intelligence, writing motivation, and their attitudes toward written corrective feedback. The findings of this study revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female students with regard to these variables. Several prior studies have found that there was no significant difference between male and female students' writing-related variables (e.g., Bourke & Adams, 2012; Ginting, 2018; Liu & Chang, 2010). It seems that other variables rather than students' gender can affect their beliefs.

Grounded on the findings of the present study, further experimental studies can be conducted to examine whether and how in-class activities can improve EFL students' incremental theory of intelligence, writing motivation, and attitudes toward feedback. Furthermore, the effect of manipulating these attitudinal variables on students' engagement with teacher feedback and writing improvement in the short and long run can be investigated. In addition, other individual difference variables such as writing apprehension and writing self-efficacy can also be investigated to have a better picture of second language writing.

The findings of the present study indicated that EFL students' incremental theory of writing intelligence was positively correlated with their writing motivation and feedback seeking orientation. These findings suggest that EFL students' implicit theories of the flexibility of their cognitive abilities can either motivate or demotivate them to write in a second language. To be more precise, those students who are of a high level of entity theory of intelligence seem to have lower levels of writing motivation since they feel they do not have the potential to extend their knowledge and abilities; thus, they do not have a positive attitude toward educational interventions, such as teacher feedback. On the other hand, those who believe in the flexibility of their cognitive abilities are more motivated to write in a second language; accordingly, they welcome teacher feedback to improve their writing abilities.

These findings are of significance since several prior studies (e.g., Baker & Montgomery, 2007; Carless, 2006; Cohen, 1987; Hoomanfard, 2017) have shown that second language learners' attitude toward teacher corrective feedback can significantly affect students' engagement with comments, and in turn, can influence their writing ability. The findings of this study can inform second language writing teachers about the way their students' attitudes are related to their writing motivation and implicit theories of writing intelligence. Thus, as an implication of this study, second language teachers and materials developers are recommended to both encourage students' incremental theory of intelligence and motivate them to write in their foreign language. Prior studies have shown that students' incremental theory of intelligence (Aronson et al., 2002; Dweck, 2006) and writing motivation (Ekholm, et al., 2015; Sasaki, 2011) can be extended by pedagogical measures. In EFL contexts, where students' use of foreign language out of classroom is limited or non-existence, EFL teachers should benefit from pedagogical measures

through lectures and research-based projects to improve their students' incremental theory of intelligence and writing motivation.

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