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The Relationship between Writing Strategies, Self-Efficacy and Writing Ability: A Case of Iranian EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to explore the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs, writing strategies, and writing abilities of Iranian EFL learners. The study first investigated the relationship between self-efficacy and writing strategies, then examined the relationship between self-efficacy and writing ability. The participants were 120 students learning English in Iran Language Institute in Gorgan, Iran. Data were gathered by means of a writing strategies questionnaire, a self-efficacy belief questionnaire, and an IELTS writing task. The results of Pearson correlation tests showed that there were significant relationship between self-efficacy and writing strategies on the one hand, and self-efficacy and writing ability on the other hand. The results have some implications for teaching writing in the EFL context.

Keywords: Writing strategies, Self-efficacy, Writing ability, Iranian Students, EFL

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1. Introduction

Writing is one of the key skills in language teaching and some researchers believe that learners' success is related to their writing ability (Lerstorm, 1990). In approaching a writing passage in English, learners use writing strategies to write a text better. These strategies are different in the students because proficient learners are more aware of writing process than novice learners. Lipstein and Renninger (2007) declared that successful learners develop a better understanding of writing skill, set writing goals, and use different writing strategies. A better understanding of learning strategies will lead to more students' interest and motivation and lack of suitable strategies will lead to low motivation for students. Many other factors affect writing skill. In social cognitive theory, Bandura (1986) stated self-efficacy as a person's belief about his/her abilities. "Self-efficacy is people's judgment of their capabilities to organize or execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p.391).

Bandura (1986) points out that self-efficacy is related to learners' effort and persistence for performing a particular task. Students with high self-efficacy level relate their failure to low attempt and inadequate efforts and those who are low efficacious attribute it to deficient abilities and most of the time, they are anxious. Bandura (1986) pointed out that four main factors are important in learners' self-efficacy: Enactive attainment, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological state are the main factors which influence self-efficacy. Enactive attainment is the most important factor and which is related to the authentic mastery experience, success and failure that students experience during the course. Success will enhance efficacy and failure will decrease it. Other people's experience has an important role in self-efficacy. When others are doing a task, a person can conclude he/she is capable of doing a similar task and boosts self-efficacy beliefs. According to Bandura, verbal persuasions can help people to raise their self-efficacy and reduce their stress and fear

and leads to better and more self-efficacy. This study investigated the relationship between EFL learners' self-efficacy, writing strategies and their writing abilities. The findings of this study may shed light on the issue of writing strategies and self-efficacy beliefs and help teachers to foster their students' writing skill. Accordingly, the following three research questions were investigated in the study:

1. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy and writing strategies?
2. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy and their writing ability?

Based on the research questions, the following null hypotheses were proposed:

1. There is no significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy and writing strategies.
2. There is no significant relationship between EFL learners' self-efficacy and writing ability.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theories of writing

Writing is an important skill in teaching English as a foreign language. Richards and Schmidt (2002) define writing as strategies, procedures, and decision-making processes which are used when they write about a topic. They stated that writing includes planning, drafting, reviewing and revising processes.

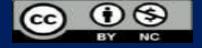
Graham (1997) mentioned four important areas in writing process: 1. Knowledge of writing and writing topics, 2. skills for creating a text, 3. Motivating learners to write about the particular topic enthusiastically, 4. Using strategies and directing learners' thought and action to obtain specified goals. Raimes (1991) stated that there were two types of writing in EFL classes: writing for learning and writing for display. Writing for learning means pre-writing, drafting, revisions, and editing. Writing for display includes examination writing.

Raimes (1991) stated that there are three approaches in writing: product approach, process approach, and genre approach. In product approach writing is considered as a product and form and linguistic knowledge is the most important component. Process approach is related to the writer and genre approach pays attention to the reader. Product approach is a traditional approach for teaching writing. Badger and White (2000) described writing as primarily about linguistic knowledge which emphasizes appropriate use of

vocabulary, syntax, and cohesive devices. Genre approach is the third approach in writing. Badger and White (2000) stated that genre approach is derived from and an extended version of product approach. Product approach and genre approach are called "predominantly linguistic". However, genre approach is different from product approach because it depends on the social context in which it is produced. Process approach is different from two other approaches. The teacher reads the students' writing, responds to their writing and students proffer experiences, ideas, attitudes and feeling to be shared with the reader (White & Arndt, 1991). This approach emphasizes the process a person goes through when writing.

Silva (1990) defined four approaches in writing process. They were controlled approach, the current-traditional rhetoric approach, the process approach, and social approach. Controlled or guided approach is the first stage of writing and it derived from structural linguistics and behaviorist psychology. The second stage is influenced by Kaplan's theory of contrastive rhetoric. It involves identifying and internalizing organizational patterns. Process approach is the third approach whereby learning to write is developing efficient and effective writing strategies. Last stage is social approach and learning to write is part of becoming socialized to discourse community. With these explanations, four theories were defined in writing instruction: Contrastive rhetoric theory, cognitive development theory, communication theory, and social constructionist theory. Kaplan (1966) proposed contrastive rhetoric theory which examined the informal differences between texts written by native and non-native speakers of English. These textual differences have been related to the cultural differences in rhetorical expectation and conventions. Flower and Hayes's model (1981) is a major models in this theory.

Communication theory is about social and political purposes of discourse rituals. Communication is so important in this theory and it is about individualism and independent interaction in society and emphasizes multiple levels of discourse like economic, social, material, institutional, and cultural. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) stated that academic writing needs to combine structural sentence units into a more-or-less unique, cohesive and coherent larger structures.



Social constructionism is the fourth theory in writing and it is believed that concepts, models, and knowledge are not discovered as much as people construct or make them.

2.2. Writing strategies

Kellogg (1988) argued that suitable writing strategies increase students' writing performance. Teachers are so important in helping students for starting, drafting, revising, and editing (Silva, 1990). Writing Strategies are cognitive and metacognitive procedures writers use to control the production of writing. There are eight categories in writing strategies. Planning is the first category in which writers decide what to write about. Global planning is the next category and is about organizing the text as a whole. In rehearsing, writers try out ideas and in repeating phase, they provide impetus to continue writing. Writers review what had already been written down in pre-reading and in questioning they classify ideas and evaluate them. Revising and editing are the last categories which are related to making some changes in order to clarify meaning and correct syntax and spelling (Arndt, 1987).

2.3. Self-efficacy

Wood and Bandura (1989) assert that "perceived self-efficacy concerns people's beliefs in their capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to exercise control over events in their lives" (p. 364). Self-efficacy is not just a general belief about a person's ability but also it is wide because it is evaluation of a person's abilities in three main areas of motivation, resources, and action.

Mastery experience is the first and most important factor that affects self-efficacy. Bandura (1986) introduces this factor as enactive mastery, enactive attainment, or performance attainment. Smith and Betz (2002) describe mastery experience as the most powerful factor because it is based on experience which is direct and personal and it is related to a person's effort and skill. Strong mastery experiences can strengthen self-efficacy and adverse mastery experiences weaken it (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005) studied the relationship between self-efficacy, stress, and academic success in college. Participants were asked to complete a survey instrument to measure the level of academic self-efficacy and

perceived stress associated with 27 college-related tasks. The results revealed that academic self-efficacy is a more robust and consistent predictor than stress of academic success.

Niemivirta and Tapola (2007) investigated the relationship between self-efficacy, interest, and task performance. They examine how possible changes in self-efficacy and interest during a task relate to each other and whether these changes predict overall task performance or not. They asked 100 ninth-grade students to rate their efficacy judgment and interest when they were doing a problem-solving task. The results from a series of latent growth curve models investigated a significant overall increase in learners' self-efficacy during the task.

Yilmaz (2010) in his study aimed to find the relationship between language learning strategies, gender, proficiency and self-efficacy beliefs. The results indicated that there is a significant difference for the strategies in favor of good learners. The results showed that the highest rank was for compensation strategies and lowest rank was for affective strategies.

Tobing (2013) examined the relationship of reading strategies and self-efficacy with the reading comprehension of high school students in Indonesia. She asked 138 high school students to answer the survey of reading strategies (SORS). The results demonstrated that there was a significant relationship between reading strategies and reading comprehension. It also showed that self-efficacy had a positive relationship with reading comprehension.

Assadi Aidinlou and Masoomi Far (2014), conducted a study to investigate the relationship of self-efficacy beliefs, writing strategies, and correct use of conjunctions in Iranian EFL learners. The results showed that there was a significant relationship between students' self-efficacy beliefs and writing strategies but there was not any relationship between writing strategies and correct use of conjunctions.

The stated review of literature indicated that many researchers conducted studies to study the effects of self-efficacy on students' behavior. However there is scarcity of research as to the relationship between self-efficacy, writing strategies and writing ability in the EFL context, thus, the present study aimed at investigating this issue and in the Iranian EFL context.

3. Methodology

This is a correlational study. The researchers studied the relationship between three variables. Johnson and Christensen (2004) stated that in correlational studies, researchers try to investigate the relationship between two or more quantitative variables and make predictions according to understanding of those relationships. Data were obtained through two students' questionnaires and an IELTS writing task.

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 120 intermediate EFL students at Iran Language Institute. The students had learned English formally at school for more than five years and they participated in English language classes in this institute. The students were selected randomly.

3.2. Data Collection Instruments

Three different types of instruments were used in this study to obtain valid and reliable data. They were as follows:

- Self-efficacy questionnaire;
- Writing strategies questionnaire;
- IELTS writing task.

These instruments are explained below:

3.2.1 Self-efficacy Questionnaire

The Persian version of self-efficacy Questionnaire validated by Dehghan (2005) in Iran was used in the study (see appendices A & C). It is based on O'Neil and Herl's (1998) self-regulation trait questionnaire. It consists of eight Likart-scale questions ranging from almost never to almost always, i.e., 1- Almost Never, 2- Seldom, 3- Sometimes, 4- Often, 5- Almost Always.

The items in this questionnaire were designed to measure four constructs including planning, self-checking, Effort, and self-efficacy. The items related to self-efficacy were selected for this study.

3.2.2 Writing Strategies Questionnaire

The writing strategies questionnaire validated in Iran by Assadi Aidinlou and Masoomi Far (2014) was used in this study (see appendices B & D). It was adapted from Language Strategy Use Inventory by Cohen, Oxford and Chi (2002). Yoong (2010) mentioned that that this questionnaire has a high reliability level as the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.91. The original questionnaire includes ninety questions. It was divided into six parts according to six language skills of listening strategy, vocabulary strategy, speaking strategy, reading strategy, writing strategy, and translation strategy.

The second version of Language Strategy Use Questionnaire includes 40 statements concerning four main English language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The adapted version for this study includes ten statements for writing language skill. This questionnaire is in the form of 5-point likart scale and ranging from 1 to 5.

- Never true of me;
- Usually not true of me;
- Sometimes true of me;
- Usually true of me;
- Always true of me.

3.2.3 IELTS Writing Task 1

In this study, an IELTS task was used by the researcher to assess the learners' writing ability. The writing task was selected from the book *Academic Writing Practice for IELTS* (McCarter, 2002). The students were asked to write 150 words in 20 minutes to describe a graph.

3.3 Data collection procedures

The students were asked to complete the students' self-efficacy beliefs and writing strategies questionnaires. The students were informed that these items are about their personal views and there is no wrong or right answer. Also, they were given IELTS writing test to measure their writing ability.

3.4 Design

The study employed ex-post facto design. There were 3 variables. Self-Efficacy and writing strategies were the independent variables and writing ability was the dependent variable.

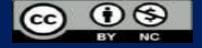
4. Data Analysis

To analyse the data, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Descriptive statistics were used to check the underlying assumptions of the statistical procedures used in the study. For the purpose of checking the hypotheses of the study Pearson correlation tests were utilized.

4.1 Results

Table 6.1 below displays the results of Pearson correlation test applied to see the relationship between self-efficacy and writing strategies. As shown in the table, the correlation coefficient is .90, thus, there is a significant positive relationship between writing strategies and self-efficacy.

Table 1: Result of Pearson Correlation Test for Self-efficacy and Writing strategies



		Writing strategies	self-efficacy
Writing strategies	Pearson Correlation	1	.908**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	94.966	64.871
	Covariance	.678	.545
	N	120	120
self-efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.908**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	64.871	69.706
	Covariance	.545	.586
	N	120	120

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in the table above, there is a positive correlation relationship between self-efficacy and writing strategies. This table shows us that students with high self-efficacy degree seem to use writing strategies higher and learners with low and moderate self-efficacy degree use less writing strategies than the first group. It can be concluded that there is a positive relationship between self-efficacy and the use of writing strategies by Iranian EFL learners. If the students experience high self-efficacy, they may use more writing strategies in their writing task.

Like the first research question, a Pearson correlation test was conducted to find the relationship between the participants' self-efficacy and writing ability. The results showed that the correlation coefficient is .93 and it is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The results are displayed in table 6.2 below.

Table 2: Result of Pearson Correlation Test for Self-efficacy and IELTS Writing ability

		IELTS Writing task1	Self-efficacy
IELTS Writing ability	Pearson Correlation	1	.937**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	3502.331	463.004
	Covariance	29.431	3.891
	N	120	120
self-efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.937**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	463.004	69.706
	Covariance	3.891	.586
	N	120	120

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

It can be concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy and their writing ability. The students with high scores in writing task usually have more writing strategies in their writing. In the next part results will be discussed in detail.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results showed that there is a positive and significant relationship

between self-efficacy of the Iranian EFL learners and their writing strategies.

Some researchers stated that the teachers should emphasize students' individual characteristics such as self-assessment (Palmquist, & Young, 1992), and self-efficacy (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). They suggested that the teachers try to understand students' learning, self-regulation, and self-efficacy beliefs. If they understand about these subjects, they can help the students with efficient and suitable planning for writing task. Zimmerman and Bandura (1994) also pointed that the students should be aware of their ability and the teachers should teach the students to improve their writing strategies and self-efficacy.

Winne (1995) recommended that the students will get better results and scores in their learning process if they check how well they progress and control the impact of and efficacy of their learning methods and strategies, try hard and test different ways to accomplish the tasks and show they are eager to finish the task efficiently, and try to have a high level of confidence in their abilities.

The findings of the first research question revealed that there was a significant relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and writing strategy use. The finding of this study were similar to Assadi Aidinlou and Masoomi Far (2014). The positive correlation between self-efficacy and writing strategies suggested that students with high self-efficacy beliefs would use more writing strategies.

The results of second research question declared that there was a significant relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and writing ability of Iranian EFL learners. These findings might suggest that an increase in self-efficacy would increase learners' writing ability and having higher writing ability would increase students' self-efficacy. Bandura (1986, 1997) believed that self-efficacy was an effective predictor to performance. It is stated that students with high self-efficacy level are more likely to improve their writing ability. Sani and Zain (2011) stated that there was a significant relationship between self-efficacy and skill improvement. They believe that students with high self-efficacy beliefs learn better and in a more efficient way.

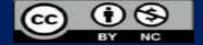
This study had some limitations which require due consideration. The first limitation of this study concerns the nature

of data collection instruments. The students completed writing strategy use questionnaire but is hard to know whether the learners use these strategies in their writing or not. Also, the participants were from one language institute, therefore, the results cannot be generalized to the population of EFL learners in Iran.

As a conclusion, this study investigated the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs, writing strategies, and writing ability of Iranian EFL learners. The findings will give insights about teaching for teachers and help them to find new ways for solving their problems in EFL writing. Teachers should encourage the students to enhance their belief about their own ability and help them to be more confident about themselves and improve their writing. It is suggested that other researchers conduct similar studies for males and females separately. Also, researchers can use other instruments like interviews to see whether there is a relationship between students' self-efficacy, use of writing strategies and students' writing ability in EFL settings.

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Appendix A: Self-Efficacy Questionnaire

- I believe I will get a high mark in this course.
Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always
- I'm certain I can comprehend easily the most difficult lessons and issues which are presented in the writing of this course.
Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always
- I'm confident I can realize the basic ideas instructed in this course.
Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always
- I'm confident I can realize the most complicated issues which are instructed by the teacher in this course.
Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always
- I'm confident I can accomplish a high quality job for homework and quizzes in this course.
Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always
- I expect to do excellent in this course.
Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always
- I'm certain I can master the skills in this course.
Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always
- Considering the difficulty of this course, the teacher and my skills, I think I will do well in this course.
Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always

Appendix B: Writing Strategies Questionnaire

- I practice writing the alphabet and/or new words in target language.
Never true of me Usually not true of me Sometimes true of me
Usually true of me Always true of me.
- I define an outline of the essay to design the way for writing.
Never true of me Usually not true of me Sometimes true of me
Usually true of me Always true of me.
- I try to write different kinds of texts in the target language.
Never true of me Usually not true of me Sometimes true of me
Usually true of me Always true of me.
- I take notes in the class in the target language as much as I'm able.
Never true of me Usually not true of me Sometimes true of me
Usually true of me Always true of me.
- I try to find different way of expressing the idea when not knowing the correct expression.
Never true of me Usually not true of me Sometimes true of me
Usually true of me Always true of me.
- I review what has already been written before continuing to write more
Never true of me Usually not true of me Sometimes true of me
Usually true of me Always true of me.
- I use reference materials such as glossary, a dictionary, or a thesaurus for finding or verifying words in the target language.
Never true of me Usually not true of me Sometimes true of me
Usually true of me Always true of me.
- I wait to edit my writing until all the ideas are down on the paper.
Never true of me Usually not true of me Sometimes true of me
Usually true of me Always true of me.
- I revise my writing once or twice for improving the language and content.
Never true of me Usually not true of me Sometimes true of me
Usually true of me Always true of me.
- I try to get feedback from others, especially native speakers of the language.
Never true of me Usually not true of me Sometimes true of me
Usually true of me Always true of me.

Appendix C: Persian Version of Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (Dehghan, 2005)

- من فکر می‌کنم نمره خوبی در این دوره و کلاس می‌گیرم.
هرگز به ندرت گاهی اوقات بیشتر اوقات تقریباً همیشه
- من مطمئن هستم سخت‌ترین درس‌ها و موضوعات که در قسمت نوشتار ارائه می‌شود را به راحتی می‌فهمم و درک می‌کنم.
هرگز به ندرت گاهی اوقات بیشتر اوقات تقریباً همیشه
- من مطمئن هستم که مفاهیم اساسی و پایه‌ای را به راحتی خواهم فهمید.
هرگز به ندرت گاهی اوقات بیشتر اوقات تقریباً همیشه
- من مطمئن هستم که پیچیده‌ترین موضوعاتی را که معلم تدریس می‌کند را می‌فهمم.
هرگز به ندرت گاهی اوقات بیشتر اوقات تقریباً همیشه
- من مطمئن هستم که می‌توانم تکالیف و امتحانات را با کیفیت بالایی انجام دهم.
هرگز به ندرت گاهی اوقات بیشتر اوقات تقریباً همیشه
- من انتظار دارم کارم را بطور عالی انجام دهم.
هرگز به ندرت گاهی اوقات بیشتر اوقات تقریباً همیشه
- من مطمئن هستم که به شیوه خوبی مهارت‌ها را یاد خواهم گرفت.
هرگز به ندرت گاهی اوقات بیشتر اوقات تقریباً همیشه
- با در نظر گرفتن سختی این دوره درسی، تدریس معلم و مهارت‌های خودم، فکر می‌کنم این دوره را به خوبی به پایان خواهم رساند.
هرگز به ندرت گاهی اوقات بیشتر اوقات تقریباً همیشه

Appendix D- Persian Version of Writing Strategies Questionnaire (Assadi Aidinlou & Masoomi Far, 2014)

- من نوشتن‌النبا و/یا کلمات جدید را به زبان انگلیسی تمرین می‌کنم.
اصلاً دربارۀ من درست نیست معمولاً دربارۀ من درست نیست گاهی اوقات دربارۀ من درست است معمولاً دربارۀ من درست است کاملاً دربارۀ من درست است
- من برای طراحی نوشته‌ام ابتدا طرح و چارچوب کلی تعریف می‌کنم.
اصلاً دربارۀ من درست نیست معمولاً دربارۀ من درست نیست گاهی اوقات دربارۀ من درست است معمولاً دربارۀ من درست است کاملاً دربارۀ من درست است
- من سعی می‌کنم تا متون مختلفی را به انگلیسی بنویسم.
اصلاً دربارۀ من درست نیست معمولاً دربارۀ من درست نیست گاهی اوقات دربارۀ من درست است معمولاً دربارۀ من درست است کاملاً دربارۀ من درست است
- من در کلاس زبان انگلیسی تا جایی که بتوانم یادداشت برداری می‌کنم.
اصلاً دربارۀ من درست نیست معمولاً دربارۀ من درست نیست گاهی اوقات دربارۀ من درست است معمولاً دربارۀ من درست است کاملاً دربارۀ من درست است
- وقتی من اصطلاح صحیح را نمی‌دانم، سعی می‌کنم تا آراء متفاوتی برای بیان ایده‌ام بیابم.
اصلاً دربارۀ من درست نیست معمولاً دربارۀ من درست نیست گاهی اوقات دربارۀ من درست است معمولاً دربارۀ من درست است کاملاً دربارۀ من درست است
- من متنی را که نوشته‌ام مرور می‌کنم و سپس به نوشتن ادامه می‌دهم.
اصلاً دربارۀ من درست نیست معمولاً دربارۀ من درست نیست گاهی اوقات دربارۀ من درست است معمولاً دربارۀ من درست است کاملاً دربارۀ من درست است
- من از منابع مرجع مانند واژه‌نامه، فرهنگ لغت و فرهنگ جامع لغات برای یافتن کلمات مدّثر در زبان انگلیسی استفاده می‌کنم.
اصلاً دربارۀ من درست نیست معمولاً دربارۀ من درست نیست گاهی اوقات دربارۀ من درست است معمولاً دربارۀ من درست است کاملاً دربارۀ من درست است
- من تا زمانی‌که همه ایده‌ها و نظراتم را به روی کاغذ بیآورم صبر می‌کنم و نوشته‌ام را ویر می‌کنم.
اصلاً دربارۀ من درست نیست معمولاً دربارۀ من درست نیست گاهی اوقات دربارۀ من درست است معمولاً دربارۀ من درست است کاملاً دربارۀ من درست است
- من برای بهتر شدن زبان و محتوای نوشته‌ام یک یا دو باره بازمی‌بینی می‌کنم.
اصلاً دربارۀ من درست نیست معمولاً دربارۀ من درست نیست گاهی اوقات دربارۀ من درست است معمولاً دربارۀ من درست است کاملاً دربارۀ من درست است
- من سعی می‌کنم آن بقیه بخصوص سخنوران و گویندگان زبان انگلیسی استفاده کنم.
اصلاً دربارۀ من درست نیست معمولاً دربارۀ من درست نیست گاهی اوقات دربارۀ من درست است معمولاً دربارۀ من درست است کاملاً دربارۀ من درست است