



Are Girls More Anxious Than Boys? The Analysis of Writing Anxiety on Writing Achievement

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Abstract. It has been said that writing is a difficult skill to acquire because it involves not just language but also personality traits (age) and emotional aspects (writing anxiety). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to compare writing performance and writing anxiety across gender. This study also examined the correlation patterns between age, writing anxiety, and writing achievement. Factors that affect most on writing achievement most are also highlighted. As many as 83 EFL students participated in the current study. They were enrolled in an essay writing course. An independent sample t-test, Pearson-product moment, and ANCOVA analysis were employed to answer the research questions. The results demonstrated a considerable gap between males' and females' writing abilities. Despite the two groups' high anxiety levels, there is no significant difference in their writing anxiety. The results also revealed that writing performance among students is substantially connected with gender but not writing anxiety. The third finding showed that gender significantly impacts students' writing achievement more than anxiety. The implications of this study lay in the need for teachers to find suitable instructions for both male and female students and create non-threatening classrooms to optimize the students' writing performance.

Keywords: writing anxiety · gender · writing achievement

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Writing as a productive skill plays a prominent role in human life, primarily to determine the success of EFL students in learning a foreign language. Good writing skill indeed helps students to be successful in academic matters. For that reason, writing is essential (Hussin et al., 2015). EFL students are required to master their writing ability since students have to pass writing courses in their studies. Writing courses are given from the first year of their study paragraph writing. Students must take essay and academic writing

as compulsory courses in their second year. In addition, students are required to write papers for their assignments. In the final year, EFL students have to write their research report in the form of theses in English. This situation is the basis for the importance of good writing skills. However, mastering English writing skills is considered difficult due to its complexity. For example, EFL students have problems with writing, such as finding ideas, grammar usage, and mechanics (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Toba et al., 2019). Furthermore, a piece of writing should be self-explanatory in that a composition should be clear, coherent, well-organized, and logical (Quvanch & Si Na, 2022).

A recent study by Hartono & Maharani (2020) has figured out that low vocabulary mastery, lack of grammatical knowledge, and lack of writing practice are considered to be the leading cause of writing anxiety. Writing anxiety is found to be a detrimental factor in writing performance. Anxious students found difficulties generating writing ideas and obtained low scores on sentence structure. It is proved by Horwitz (2001) that students with low anxiety are more likely to write better English compositions than highly anxious students. In addition, Daly (1978) has also found that writing anxiety influenced students writing quality in terms of length of sentences and language use.

Studies in the area of writing anxiety have covered some topics, including types of writing anxiety and levels of writing anxiety which a variety of factors causes both: low confidence in one's ability to learn English, instructor evaluation, ineffective feedback, and a lack of writing practice (Jennifer & Ponniah, 2017; Wahyuni et al., 2019). Scholars have investigated the effect of anxiety on students' writing performance (Gibriel, 2019). They found that writing anxiety is correlated with the students' writing achievement. Previous research in the Korean context has also found that writing anxiety is negatively correlated with students' achievement (Jin & Guo, 2021). In other words, the higher the students' writing anxiety, the lower their writing achievement is. However, Sun & Fan's (2022) study has investigated the correlation between writing anxiety and achievement. The results showed that the correlation is not significant. The concern of doing this study is that the past findings showed inconsistent results that need to be investigated deeply about writing performance.

The following variable is gender. Gender is assumed to influence students writing anxiety. Previous studies have revealed conflicting findings about the role of gender in students writing. Gender was not significantly influenced students' writing anxiety. A study conducted on freshmen and Junior Croatian EFL students has also revealed that students' gender did not contribute to students writing anxiety (Kostić Bobanović, 2016). A study conducted in Indonesia investigating the influence of gender and academic levels on writing anxiety showed that gender and academic level do not contribute to the students writing anxiety (Mulyono et al., 2020). However, some studies have figured out the significant contributor of gender to students' writing anxiety.

Based on the explanation above, although numerous previous research has investigated some aspects of writing anxiety, several of its variables have not been investigated in different contexts. For example, a study was carried out in Indonesia to investigate writing anxiety, gender, and writing achievement. However, the previous studies have not touched upon what factors contribute to the student's writing achievement, whether gender or writing anxiety. In other words, it will be the focus of the future study to fill

in the gap of the previous studies. Some studies have revealed that writing anxiety contributes to students' writing achievement. However, it is still a big question. Therefore, this study aims at answering the aforementioned questions. The research questions are formulated as follows:

1. Is there any significant difference in writing anxiety across gender?
2. What is the Correlation Pattern Among Gender, Writing Anxiety, and Writing Achievement?
3. What variable affects most students' writing achievement?

1.2 Significance of the Problem

This study is expected to give practical contributions to the teaching of writing. The findings present some empirical data of comparisons of male and female students' writing abilities, providing valuable information on how to deliver writing instructions concerning gender. Furthermore, this study also shows the factors that contribute to writing performance. Finally, the study's findings also provide theoretical benefits in affective and personality factors in language learning, especially in writing instruction.

1.3 Objective of the Research

The research objectives are formulated as follows. This research aims to.

1. Find the difference in writing anxiety across gender
2. Find the correlation pattern among gender, writing anxiety, and writing achievement
3. Figure out the variable affecting students' writing achievement

2 Literature Review

The high demand for good writing makes students worry about not being able to perform well in writing tasks. Their negative perception of writing activity tends to lead to so-called writing anxiety. Writing anxiety is when students experience negative emotions in the writing activity. Writing anxiety is a psychological threat experienced by an individual when assigned to write caused by mixed feelings, perceptions, and attitudes toward writing. This situation affects his/her writing ability (Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012).

Furthermore, writing anxiety refers to "a situation and subject-specific individual difference" concerned with "a person's general tendencies to approach or avoid situations perceived to demand writing accompanied by some amount of evaluation" (Daly, 1978). Similar to this, Daly and Miller (1975), who were among the pioneers in the field of writing anxiety research, held that writing anxiety was defined as students' adverse reactions to writing activities, precisely their avoidance of the writing activity and its assessment. When students experience writing anxiety, their mind becomes stuck, and they feel uneasy about writing English compositions.

To acquire good writing abilities in EFL writing, students must have a solid grasp of both writing and language. Students should practice writing outside of class because

it is a skill. Their writing skills will consequently grow over time. However, for various reasons, students still find it challenging to communicate in English. There has been some investigation on the roots of writing anxiety. Writing anxiety is caused by a variety of factors, including low confidence in one's ability to learn English, instructor evaluation, ineffective feedback, and a lack of writing practice (Cheng, 2002; Jennifer & Ponniah, 2017; & Wahyuni et al., 2019).

Numerous empirical research has investigated how writing anxiety affects pupils' writing abilities. Anxiety levels change significantly between beginning and advanced college students. According to specific research findings, writing anxiety and writing performance are highly negatively-connected with students' writing performance. Higher anxiety learners were likelier to perform poorly than lower anxiety learners (Erkan & Saban, 2011, Gibriel, 2019; & Zhang, 2011).

3 Methodology

3.1 Scope of Research

This study employed a quantitative design in which the research data was analyzed using statistical analysis (Creswell, 2012). This study aims to investigate the correlation between writing anxiety and writing achievement. The second research question aims to find the correlation between gender, writing anxiety, and writing achievement.

3.2 Population and Sample

The participants of this study were students of the English Department of one private university in Malang, Indonesia. 51 female and 32 male students enrolled in an essay writing course in their second year of study. In addition, they were exposed to argumentative writing. The courses were conducted online. The students were given enough time to complete the writing assignment with some sessions of writing conference activity starting from the outline until the final essays. The student's score was obtained through the student writing product (Fig. 1).

3.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in this study is illustrated as follows:

Writing performance, on some occasions, is influenced by affective factors and personality traits. Writing anxiety in some previous studies affects students' writing performance; however, some studies found no correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance. Another variable is gender. Male and female students are found to have different writing performances since scholars have revealed that females are better at language learning. Studies also found that males and females experienced a certain degree of writing anxiety.



Fig. 1. Conceptual framework

3.4 Hypothesis

The research hypotheses are formulated as follows:

- a. There is a significant difference in writing anxiety across gender
- b. There is a significant correlation between gender, writing anxiety, and writing achievement.
- c. Writing anxiety significantly influences students' writing performance compared to their gender.

3.5 Research Instruments

In the data collection stage, the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory was administered to the students via a google form. Cheng developed the SLWAI (2004), consisting of 22 items. It is a 5-Likert scale from strongly disagree to agree strongly. The questionnaire was translated into Indonesia Language before the distribution to avoid difficulties and misunderstandings about the items. Some criteria were used to determine the level of anxiety. If the mean is lower than 55, the level of anxiety is low. The anxiety level is moderate if the mean is between 55–65. The anxiety level is high if the mean score is higher than 65.

3.6 Statistics

To answer the first research question about the difference in writing performance and writing anxiety, an independent sample t-test was employed. For the second research question, Pearson-product moment was used to know the correlation between each variable; gender, writing anxiety, and writing achievement. Finally, the third research question looked at which factors affect most writing achievement. The data was analyzed by using ANCOVA.

4 Results

This study aimed to answer three research questions about the difference between writing achievement and writing anxiety across gender, the correlation pattern among gender, writing anxiety, and writing achievement, and the factors affecting students' writing achievement.

Table 1. Descriptive of writing achievement and writing anxiety

	Gender	N	Mean	SD
Writing Score	Male	32	75.70	11.72
	Female	51	80.79	5.27
Writing Anxiety	Male	32	69.97	7.03
	Female	51	72.80	7.88

Table 2. The difference in writing performance and writing anxiety across gender

Variables	Mean Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
Writing Score	-5.08569	.008
Writing Anxiety	-2.835	.101

4.1 The Significant Difference Between Writing Achievement and Writing Anxiety Across Gender

Table 1 shows that there are 32 male and 51 female students. Females have a higher mean score (80.7873) compared to male students. Males obtained a lower mean score (75.7016). Therefore, it can be said that females have better writing achievement than male students. Based on the university scoring guideline, the female mean score equals an A grade and a B for male students. The result showed that both groups have high writing anxiety because the mean is higher than 65 ($M > 65$). Females (72.80) experienced slightly higher than males (69.97).

Table 2 above presents the result of the independent sample t-test analysis to know the difference in writing performance and writing anxiety. The data showed a significant difference in the writing score of both groups, with a significant level of .008. Females have better writing scores than male students. In terms of writing anxiety, the results indicated that there is no significant difference in the level of writing anxiety with a significant level of .101. Both groups experience a high level of anxiety when they write English compositions.

4.2 The Correlation Pattern Among Gender, Writing Anxiety and Writing Achievement

The second research question looks at the correlation between each variable, gender, writing anxiety, and writing achievement. The results of statistical data analysis are presented in the following table:

Table 3 indicates that only gender contributed significantly to the student's writing performance compared to writing anxiety, with a significant value (.008). Meanwhile, writing anxiety does not contribute to students' writing performance. The results revealed that the p-value of writing anxiety (.087) is higher than the significance level of .05. Furthermore, the data showed no correlation between gender and writing anxiety.

Table 3. The correlation pattern among gender, writing anxiety and writing achievement

		Gender	Writing Score	Writing Anxiety
Gender	Pearson Correlation	1	.287**	.181
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.008	.101
	N	83	83	83
Writing Score	Pearson Correlation	.287**	1	.087
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008		.435
	N	83	83	83
Writing Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	.181	.087	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.101	.435	
	N	83	83	83

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

Table 4. The factors affecting students' writing performance

Source	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	258.125	3.663	.030
Intercept	5109.979	72.509	.000
Writing Anxiety	7.689	.109	.742
Gender	469.745	6.666	.012

a. R Squared = .084 (Adjusted R Squared = .061)

4.3 Factors Affecting Students' Writing Performance

The third research question measures how much gender and writing anxiety contribute to proficiency levels performance. Again, a statistical analysis using ANCOVA was deployed. The results can be seen below:

Table 4 shows the result of the ANCOVA analysis to find out what factors affect writing performance. The result showed that gender significantly affects the students' writing performance with a significant level of .030 ($\alpha = 0.05$). In contrast, writing anxiety does not significantly contribute to the student's writing performance. Thus, it can be said that gender contributes to the student's writing performance but not the students' writing anxiety.

5 Discussions

This study has answered three research questions about the difference in writing anxiety across gender, the correlation pattern among gender, writing anxiety, and writing achievement, and to find out the factors affecting students' writing achievement. The findings

of the first research questions showed that females have better writing scores than their male counterparts. The finding of this study is in contrast with another study that there is no significant difference in the writing ability of male and female undergraduate students (Adaeze Regis-Onuoha & Chukwu, 2022). Meanwhile, this study conforms to the prior research comparing males' and females' academic achievement. Studies have proven that females were more successful than males in writing tasks (Daly & Miller, 1975; Meier et al., 1984). Similarly, a recent study has proven that the writing proficiency of EFL female undergraduate students is higher than males (Cahyono & Rahayu, 2020).

Concerning the difference in writing anxiety, it is shown that there is no significant difference in the level of writing anxiety because both groups have a high level of writing anxiety. In this study, even though the difference is not significant, the mean score showed that females experience slightly higher than male students. The previous study also found similar findings (Abu-Rabia *, 2004; Y. Cheng, 2002; Razak et al., 2017; Salikin, 2019). This study also supports Kurniasih et al. (2021) that there is no statistical difference in the level of anxiety in this online writing class in which students experience moderate anxiety. However, some studies found that males face more anxiety than females (Jebreil et al., 2015; Karatas et al., 2016). Knowing the fact that female students experience slightly higher anxiety, but they are better at writing performance. Salahshour et al. (2013) declared that female learners are better at learning languages since they tend to look for more opportunities to get involved in their studies and practice.

Similarly, female students are considered good language learners (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014). A previous study comparing the grammatical errors made by female and male students found that female students made fewer errors than male students. It is also found that female writers pay more attention to language use, making them attentive writers to produce high-quality writing (Furtina et al., 2016).

From the analysis of the correlation between gender, writing anxiety, and writing performance, it was found that the role of gender in writing achievement is significant. Female students outperformed in writing males in the 6–9 grades (Zhang et al., 2019). Similarly, in different levels of writing, gender also becomes the predictor of the student's writing performance when doing summary writing (Olagbaju, 2020). However, the current study's findings did not support a study that found that there is no effect of gender on students' writing (Shen & Bai, 2022). Understanding the critical role of gender in writing assignments, teachers must individualize instructions referring to gender. Since female students have better writing performance than male students, teachers should be able to find suitable teaching techniques for both groups.

This study also revealed that writing anxiety did not contribute to the students writing. The findings of this study support the previous study measuring the correlation between four affective factors (motivation, attitude, writing anxiety, and self-efficacy). The results of the data analysis revealed that writing anxiety did not contribute to the student's performance. Only motivation correlated with writing achievement (Kurniasih et al., 2022). Similarly, Sun & Fan (2022) have figured out that there is a significant correlation between writing anxiety and achievement. However, it is essential to note that some studies showed a negative correlation between writing anxiety and writing achievement (Tahmouresi & Papi, 2021). Among other affective factors, writing anxiety

was correlated negatively with writing self-efficacy and writing achievement motivation (Sabti et al., 2019). Therefore, teachers must facilitate students to improve their self-efficacy and motivation to perform well in writing English compositions.

6 Conclusions

Writing is believed to be a complex skill to master involving both linguistics and personality and affective factors, such as age and writing anxiety. Therefore, this study measures the difference between writing anxiety and writing performance across gender. The finding showed a significant difference in writing performance among female and male students. Meanwhile, there is no significant difference in the writing anxiety of the two groups since they have a high level of anxiety. The second research question showed that gender is correlated significantly with the student's writing performance. However, writing anxiety did not have any correlation with writing performance. The third finding revealed that gender contributes more to students' writing than anxiety. The findings of this study have important implications for teachers who want to improve their students' writing abilities. They call for non-threatening classroom environments and instructions appropriate for both male and female students, such as integrating technology, allocating vocabulary and grammar focus, giving contextual topics, and others (see Kurniasih & Saukah, 2021).

Understanding that gender plays a significant role in the student's performance. It is suggested that future studies look at how female students work on the writing task and why male students scored lower on the writing tasks. This study's findings showed that female students ($M = 80.7873$) scored better in writing than male students (75.7016). The test given was not time-limited. The students were given adequate time to complete their writing assignments through the various consultation sessions. Therefore, their anxiety may not hinder them from performing well in writing. Further study may also investigate the effect of a timed-limited test on writing anxiety since a timed-limited test creates different emotions on the students' side. Furthermore, further studies may also examine the difference in students' writing anxiety after exposure to different teaching methods.

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