



# Writing Anxiety Among Indonesian EFL University Students

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**Abstract.** This study explores the distribution of writing anxiety experienced by Indonesian EFL university students. More specifically, it compares writing anxiety levels of EFL undergraduate sophomore and junior groups. A total of 303 EFL university students were involved in this study. It consists of 141 sophomores and 162 junior students. A 22-item of Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) developed by Cheng (2004) was used to find out the levels and types of anxiety. The result showed that the majority of students for both levels faced high anxiety with a mean score of 73.88 (sophomores) and 72.42 (juniors). Further statistical analysis using an independent sample t-test indicated that there is no significant difference in the level of anxiety of both groups. In terms of the types of anxiety, sophomores and juniors faced three types of anxiety, namely avoidance behavior, somatic anxiety, and cognitive anxiety. Cognitive anxiety obtained the highest mean score for both groups; 26.11 for sophomores and 25.78 for juniors. The study demonstrated students' writing anxiety in English writing which was influenced by their concern about others' perceptions of their writing. Pedagogical implications and suggestions for future research were also given in this study.

**Keywords:** writing anxiety · types of anxiety · EFL students · academic level

## 1 Introduction

Putting down ideas in a comprehensive written form requires complex knowledge including vocabulary, grammar, writing mechanics, unity, and coherence aspects. To be able to produce well-organized writing, students need to have persistent practice [1]. Writing is considered a demanding language skill for students [2] [3] and it is more challenging than other language skills [4]. Insufficient writing knowledge will lead students to a serious problem that may affect their emotions and perceptions of writing-related activities. With the negative emotions, students will likely experience writing anxiety. Moreover, the current study took place in emergency remote teaching due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Students are expected to adjust to the new way of classroom delivery in which they are expected to be responsible, disciplined, and motivated, and independent learners to succeed in online learning [5].

Writing anxiety is a situation in which students experience unpleasant feelings and avoid getting involved in writing tasks. Writing anxiety may be caused by linguistic

matters and non-linguistic ones. When students are required to utilize the target language, take exams, and worry about receiving unfavorable feedback from others are some conditions that lead to Foreign Language Anxiety [6]. Some other factors include assignments, their perception of others' negative comments, and being afraid of getting a poor grade in writing [7]. Previous studies have shown that writing anxiety has a significant correlation with students' writing ability. More specifically, learners who are highly anxious produced a lower quality level compared to students with low anxiety levels [8, 9].

Writing anxiety is categorized into Avoidance Behaviour, Somatic Anxiety, and Cognitive Anxiety [10]. Cognitive anxiety deals with emotions that are caused by the students' concern about others' negative evaluations of their writing. Somatic anxiety is related to the affective side. It refers to the students' bodily reactions when experiencing anxiety, such as sweaty, trembling, and heart-pounding. Avoidance behavior portrays students' refusal to get involved in the writing activities.

Some studies have investigated the difference in writing anxiety among university students at the level of sophomores and juniors. Most studies have reported that sophomores and juniors groups were in a high level of anxiety [11, 12]. Regarding the results of comparison between levels of writing anxiety, the results showed inconsistent results. A study conducted in the Indonesian context revealed a significant difference [12], while the study in Afghanistan [11] indicated there is no statistically significant difference.

Researchers have reported different results on the type of writing anxiety experienced by students [7]. Prior research has found that Cognitive anxiety was commonly experienced by students [7, 10, 14]. It is the result of worry of negative comments and evaluations from teachers and friends. Their anxiety is also caused by their worry about getting a low score in writing. Some studies also found that Somatic anxiety dominates the students' anxiety. This type of anxiety is indicated by bodily reactions when feeling anxiety, such as trembling, sweaty, and heart beating fast [15, 16]. Meanwhile, in a study involving Malaysian ESL students [17] reported that they have a high level of avoidance behavior type of anxiety.

Based on the research results, more studies are still necessary to clarify conflicting findings. The urgency of this research lies in the context of the teaching and learning process. There have been a few studies investigating writing anxiety in the online learning environment. Meanwhile, it is predicted that students also experience a certain degree of writing anxiety in the new mode of learning. It is also necessary to compare the levels of anxiety and types of anxiety between the two groups. This research attempts to answer two research questions:

1. *Is there any significant difference in the levels of writing anxiety between sophomores and juniors?*
2. *Is there any significant difference in types of writing anxiety between sophomores and juniors?*

## **2 Method**

Aimed at comparing the levels and types of anxiety between sophomores and juniors, this study involves students from six universities in Indonesia. The total participants were

**Table 1.** Levels of writing anxiety

Level of Students	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Sophomores	141	73.88	9.629	.811
Juniors	162	72.43	8.869	.697

**Table 2.** The difference in levels of writing anxiety

	T	df	Mean difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
Writing Anxiety Score	1.361	301	1.447	.174

303 university students consisting of 141 sophomores and 162 juniors. Sophomores received materials about writing at the sentence and paragraph levels, while juniors learned how to write essays and academic writing. The participants were recruited using the convenience sampling technique. A Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory developed by Cheng (2002) was used in this study to obtain information about anxiety levels and their types. The questionnaire consists of 22 items which are divided into three categories: Somatic (2, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15, 19), Cognitive (1, 3, 7, 9, 14, 17, 20, 21), and Avoidance Behavior (4, 5, 10, 12, 16, 18, 22). Some items (1, 4, 17, 18, 22) required reverse scoring before being calculated to the overall scores. To determine the levels of anxiety, criteria of categorization were employed using the following criteria. If the mean is lower than 50, the level of anxiety is low (Low,  $M < 50$ ). If the mean is between 50–60, it is categorized as moderate anxiety (Moderate,  $M = 50\text{--}65$ ). If the mean is higher than 65, the level of anxiety is high (High,  $M > 65$ ).

### 3 Findings

#### 3.1 The Levels of Writing Anxiety Between Sophomores and Juniors

Measuring student writing anxiety and comparing it between sophomores and juniors are the objective of the first research question. The descriptive analysis demonstrated that the mean for Sophomores was 73.88, while the juniors obtained a slightly lower mean, 72.43. This data indicated that both groups experienced a high writing anxiety level because the mean was above 65. The findings are presented in Table 1.

The independent sample t-test was used to analyze the difference in the anxiety levels across sophomores and juniors. The difference between the two groups' level of significance is .174, which is higher than the significant value of .05. As a result, it can be concluded that students' anxiety levels do not significantly differ depending on their academic years (Table 2).

#### 3.2 Types of Writing Anxiety Between Sophomores and Juniors

The second research question identifies the types of writing anxiety and finds the differences in types of anxiety between sophomore and junior students. The result of the

**Table 3.** The types of writing anxiety

Type	Lev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean
Cognitive	Sop	141	26.11	3.73	.313
	Jun	162	25.78	3.382	.266
Somatic	Sop	141	24.49	4.664	.393
	Juni	162	24.21	4.850	.381
Avoidance behavior	Sop	141	23.28	4.183	.352
	Jun	162	22.44	3.870	.304

**Table 4.** The difference in types of writing anxiety

Types of Anxiety	T	df	Mean difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
Cognitive Anxiety	808	301	330	.420
Somatic Anxiety	509	301	279	.611
Avoidance Behavior	1.119	301	838	.071

analysis regarding the difference in types of writing anxiety between sophomores and Juniors is described in Table 3.

The first type of anxiety, Cognitive anxiety, obtained the highest mean compared to Somatic Anxiety and Avoidance Behavior types. Sophomores (26.11) happened to be more anxious than the Juniors students (25.78). The second type of anxiety also showed a similar trend that sophomores (24.49) experienced higher anxiety levels compared to juniors (24.21) students for somatic anxiety. Avoidance behavior scored the lowest mean value. The results of statistical analysis indicated a similar trend to the Cognitive and Somatic anxiety that Sophomores' (23.28) mean score is higher than junior (22.44) counterparts.

The result of the analysis regarding the difference in types of writing anxiety between sophomores and juniors is described in Table. 4.

Statistical analysis using the independent t-test analysis proved that the types of anxiety between Sophomores and Juniors were not significantly different. The significance value for Cognitive anxiety is .420, .611 for Somatic anxiety, and .071 for Avoidance behavior. Those significant levels are higher than 0.05; therefore, it can be highlighted that the types of writing anxiety among sophomores and juniors were not significant.

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Level of Writing Anxiety

The results of the current study's analysis of anxiety levels revealed that juniors (72.43) and sophomores (73.88) both indicated a high level of anxiety. The findings of this

study correspond to the result of previous studies [14, 18], and [19]. This problem is not only experienced by English students but also non-English students when writing English compositions [16]. That Sophomores experienced higher anxiety than their juniors proved by the mean score. Sophomores have lower writing experience compared to juniors in terms of years of study. Based on a recent study conducted in Afghanistan, the anxiety levels among students who were in different academic years were not significantly different. [11].

Wahyuni et al. [12] found significant differences among sophomore, Juniors, and senior students. One similar finding of the current study and their study is that the level of anxiety for sophomores is high. Meanwhile, the level of anxiety of Juniors students does not correspond to their findings. They found that Juniors and Senior students have moderate anxiety. It can be said that students at any level of education might encounter difficulties in writing due to several issues, such as the online learning atmosphere, types of assignments, as well as lack of interaction with teachers and classmates. However, the findings of this study are in contrast with the prior studies carried out in different contexts because [15] and [20] found that students have a moderate anxiety level. It is important to note that writing anxiety gives a negative contribution to the student's writing skill regardless of their anxiety levels [3, 20, 21].

## 4.2 Types of Anxiety

Based on the result of data analysis, students' writing anxiety stemmed from cognitive anxiety. The data indicated that students experience anxiety due to some factors coming from the internal aspect, such as their perception of other negative evaluations, their fear of getting low grades, and others. This study agrees with some studies [12, 19, 22]. Those problems will influence the writing activities and hinder them from having better writing performance.

However, the study does not correspond to some studies which have proven that Somatic anxiety becomes the major type of writing anxiety that occurred among students [15, 16, 23]. In addition, a study found that the last type of anxiety, avoidance behavior, was found to be the most troublesome type of anxiety compared to cognitive and somatic anxiety [17]. In this case, students tend to avoid situations where they have to write English texts. With the varied results of studies on this topic, it is understood that students with different cultures and geographical, social, and background knowledge about writing experience different writing anxiety. However, the findings of the study informed that the most dominant type of anxiety encountered by sophomores and juniors was Cognitive anxiety.

## 4.3 Pedagogical Implications

This study has reported that both sophomores and juniors were highly anxious during the writing activities. Most students experience cognitive compared to somatic and avoidance behavior. This study provides evidence about the students' emotions when writing English compositions. Some pedagogical implications arise from this study such as teachers may consider the findings of the current study to provide assistance and increase students' management of emotions in class. Furthermore, the results of this research

can be used to design non-anxiety-provoking through implementing anxiety-reducing strategies.

## 5 Conclusion

Learning a foreign language is a challenge for EFL students. Some students tend to deal with the psychological aspect, in this case, anxiety both in the offline and online learning environment. The phenomenon that happens to students in this study, online learning with its specific nature, also adds empirical findings on the students' anxiety levels and their type. According to the result data analysis, sophomore and junior students were in the same level of anxiety. They encountered a high level of anxiety with cognitive anxiety as the most dominant anxiety. It is important to note that students with different years of study also experience anxiety.

Considering the writing anxiety level, it is suggested that teachers implement some techniques to reduce students' writing anxiety and also acknowledge students' points of view toward the strategies implemented by teachers. Furthermore, this study also provides suggestions for the improvement of studies in this area. Further research may investigate the teachers' strategies to help students reduce writing anxiety.

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