



Linking EFL Students' Writing Anxiety to Writing Performance

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Abstract. Writing anxiety refers to negative emotions when students are situated in writing activities. Studies have found that negative feelings may hinder students from performing well. Seeing the negative influence of anxiety on performance, this study examines the correlation between writing anxiety and students' writing performance. The participants were sophomore students registered in the essay writing subject. They were recruited using convenience sampling. As many as 43 students from a private university in Indonesia participated in this study. They passed the paragraph writing in the second semester. The data was collected in the essay writing course. SLWAI questionnaire was analyzed using statistical analysis. The descriptive statistics showed that students experience high anxiety, with a mean score of 70.09. Regarding the students' performance, the mean score was 71.77. Furthermore, the analysis using an independent sample t-test revealed that the relationship between writing anxiety and writing performance was insignificant. The significance of this study for teaching purposes and suggestions for further research are also given.

Keywords: Writing anxiety, Writing performance, EFL students.

1 Introduction

Writing is considered a challenging skill to master for students in order to be successful in their studies. Writing is a complex process that can be categorized as one cognitive problem-solving activity requiring deliberate cognitive and psychological effort. To produce text in L1 or L2, students need adequate writing knowledge, especially in a foreign language context. Furthermore, students must put much cognitive effort into this intellectual, driven goal and communicative process. Some affective variables, such as motivation, attitude, and emotion, also contribute to the writing process [1]. Students with strong motivation, self-confidence, and high cognitive ability will not face severe difficulties in producing English texts. However, a student with a lack of English ability, low motivation, and high anxiety will likely experience more difficulties in writing. Therefore, it can be said that writing involves both psychological and cognitive aspects.

The status of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in this study context is predicted to add more challenges in writing. EFL students, in the process of text production,

should integrate their knowledge about the topic, grammar, writing mechanics, and vocabulary. However, students face many challenges when writing English due to limited vocabulary, inadequate grammar knowledge, and inadequate practice, which may lead to writing anxiety [2]. Furthermore, writing anxiety refers to students' psychological traits that may hinder the learning process. Previous studies have found that anxiety negatively affects students' language performance, producing less complex and short text [3], [4].

Writing is a skill that needs students to have frequent practice both in and outside the class, so their writing skills will gradually improve. However, many students still strive to express their ideas in a written form because of various factors. Previous studies reported some aspects causing writing anxiety, such as lack of self-confidence, inadequate effective feedback, teacher evaluation, and insufficient writing practice [5]–[7]. In addition, writing anxiety occurs due to low linguistics competence, low self-esteem, and fear of negative comments [8].

To be more precise, writing anxiety refers to the emotions when writing English text. Writing anxiety occurs when students have negative emotions toward writing. As a consequence, they tend to avoid writing activities [9]. Another scholar conveyed that they experience anxiety because they fear writing and receiving comments [10]. Furthermore, it is also emphasized that anxiety is closely related to the student's emotional state when students learn English skills [11].

Writing anxiety has been well-researched in the area of language learning. Some studies have found varied results concerning the effect of writing anxiety on performance. Some studies reported that anxiety becomes a detrimental factor influencing students' performance. Some studies prove that writing anxiety and writing performance are negatively correlated, so students who experience high anxiety write shorter and poor essays [8], [12]. However, some studies found inconsistent findings that anxiety does not correlate with the student's performance, indicating a deeper delve into the field of the study is required to provide more empirical data. Therefore, this study aims to answer two research questions.

1. To what extent do the students experience writing anxiety?
2. Is there any significant correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance?

2 Method

The current study aims to investigate the correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance. The design was a correlational study. The students of Essay writing were informed about the purpose of this study and were willing to participate. The essay Writing course was a compulsory subject offered to second-year students. In this writing class, the students were instructed to write argumentative essays. They wrote the essay individually and collaboratively. The students at one time were given

the freedom to choose their own topics. However, students were asked to choose from the alternative topics at another time. In addition, the learning models are mixed between individual and group work. There were also some games like debate and story chains to create a convenient class environment. Overall, the teacher implemented Writing Process Approach. Before the students write the final essay, their outline was first checked, commented on, and given feedback. The students' scores are taken from some essays submitted during the semester, including take-home exams and sit-it exams with previous preparation on the topic and resources.

As many as 50 students filled out the Second Language Writing Anxiety questionnaire developed by Cheng (2002) consisting of 22 items with 5 Likert-scale. They are 5 (Strongly Agree), 4 (Agree), 3 (Neutral), 2 (Disagree), and 1 (Strongly Disagree). Some of the questions are written in negative statements. So, reverse scoring is required. However, only 43 students completed the writing test. Therefore, only 43 students were considered to be the respondents. To know the students' level of anxiety, the mean score was categorized into three levels: Low (Mean: < 55), Moderate (Mean: 55-65), and High (Mean: >65). Furthermore, the obtained data were also analyzed using the Pearson product-moment correlation to see the correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Findings

3.1.1 Level of students' anxiety

This study looks at the level of students writing anxiety. The participants of the study were 43 students enrolled in an essay writing course. The descriptive statistics demonstrated that students' mean score in writing performance was 71.77, equal to a B grade in the university scoring system. In addition, they experienced a high level of anxiety, proven by the mean score of 70.09, which was higher than 65. The result can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Distribution of Mean Score of Writing Performance and Writing Anxiety

	Descriptive Statistics		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Writing Performance	71.77	9.245	43
Writing Anxiety	70.09	8.761	43

3.1.2 Correlation between writing Performance and writing anxiety

To see the correlation between writing performance and writing anxiety, data were analyzed using Pearson Correlation.

Table 2. Correlations

Correlations		Writing Performance	Writing Anxiety
Writing Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	-.131
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.404
	N	43	43
Writing Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-.131	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.404	
	N	43	43

The table above indicated that the students' writing anxiety was not significantly correlated with their writing performance because the significant value is .0404 which is higher than .05.

3.2 Discussions

This study aims to answer two research questions. First, this research reported high student writing anxiety levels after data collection by distributing the SLWAI questionnaire and writing scores. The second finding showed that the correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance indicated no correlation between anxiety and performance. Among those factors, foreign language anxiety is considered the most influential affective filter that may hinder the success and effectiveness of learning a foreign language acquisition [13].

The results uncovered that the students experienced a high anxiety level, with a mean score of 70.09. Since the mean score is higher than 65, it is categorized as high. These findings confirmed the recent study that revealed most Filipino students experienced a high level of anxiety [14]. Earlier studies in the Indonesian context also reported high writing anxiety [15]–[17]. In addition, the current study also reported that most students (48.6%) were highly anxious, 43.3% were at a moderate level, and 8.3% had low anxiety. That report was supported by interview data that students admitted that they experience anxiety when writing [2]. Furthermore, medical students also experienced high anxiety when writing English essays due to low English proficiency, lack of writing practice, confidence, and worry about writing tests [18]. However, this study contradicts the earlier research, which found that EFL students have

moderate anxiety in the online writing class. The different contexts of the learning showed different writing anxiety results. Students exposed to online writing tended to have moderate writing anxiety [19].

Further analysis revealed no significant correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance. It revealed that students' writing performance is not influenced by their anxiety level. Even though the statistical analysis showed high anxiety levels, students still can manage their emotions when writing essays. It is also supported by the less frightening classroom situation. However, this study negates the previous study, propagating a negative correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance [8], [12]. In this study, the students with high anxiety showcased a moderate writing performance (B grade) in the university grading system. Even though the study showed that writing anxiety did not contribute to writing performance, the students can improve their score to an A if they can alleviate their anxiety.

From the previous discussion, this study shed light that anxiety did not correlate with writing performance because students were exposed to less stressful learning environments. Therefore, some other factors might contribute to students writing performance, such as motivation [20]. Among other affective variables (attitude, self-efficacy, and writing anxiety), only motivation significantly correlated with writing performance. In addition, the previous study explained motivation, self-efficacy, and anxiety as contributing factors in EFL writing [21]. Previous scholars also agreed that learning a foreign language is influenced by several factors (students' ability, personality types, self-efficacy, learning style, and affective variables) [11]. The students also experienced anxiety in a negative learning environment and had stressful pressure from their peers [22]

4. Conclusion

Writing anxiety is still an intriguing topic to explore since it is part of the student's process of learning a foreign language. This study attempts to answer two research questions concerning the degree of writing anxiety and its correlation with writing performance. The SPSS analysis revealed that students experienced high anxiety levels in writing English texts. However, further analysis showed that their high anxiety did not correlate with their writing performance, creating a fascinating fact since students should have a proper way of controlling their emotions during writing. Looking at the classroom activities, it can be understood that a less stressful classroom helps students to feel relaxed and write better. The findings of this study are expected to be useful for teachers. Furthermore, there is still room for improvement in conducting research on this topic since there has not been research on integrating ICT to help students reduce their anxiety.

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