

Students' anxiety in learning English writing in higher education

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Abstract - Research studies on students' writing anxiety have been done in many EFL teaching contexts. However, there are still very limited scientific articles published about university students' foreign language writing anxiety and the causes in the Indonesian university context. Therefore, this study's main purpose was to analyze students' anxiety in EFL writing and its causes. This study employed a descriptive quantitative method. The study subjects were chosen from the first-year students of the Accounting Study Program of Muhammadiyah University of Palopo academic year 2021-2022, which consists of three classes. Two types of questionnaires were used for collecting the data. The first questionnaire was based on Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI). The questionnaire consisted of 21 items designed to assess students' English writing anxiety. The second questionnaire, the Second Language Writing Fear Inventory (CSLWFI), which was adopted to find out the causes of a feeling of anxiety in writing, consisted of ten questions. SPSS ver. 20 was used to analyze the gathered data. The findings revealed that the student's English writing anxiety was significant, and the key causes were poor understanding of writing concepts, linguistic obstacles, insufficient writing skill practice, and time restrictions.

Keywords: causes of anxiety, EFL writing, writing anxiety, writing concepts

1. Introduction

Writing is not a new skill to learn. It is not just for the language learners to study, but learners of every field of study. Students of Accounting, Law, Mathematics, and so on learn to be good writers to write and finish their academic tasks.

Theoretically, writing refers to putting thoughts into a text or actual text that can be read and comprehended. Writing expresses ideas, experiences, and feelings. Finocchiaro (1974) states that students should share their opinions, experiences, emotions, and feelings in writing. Writing skills should be developed, for it is not natural, Nunan (1989). People learn languages physically and mentally. Dumais (1988) says writing in English fills the gap between expressing thoughts, feelings, and opinions in Indonesia and English. In the meantime, writing is a fundamental linguistic skill that students should master. Students must also be proficient in spelling, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, the arrangement of ideas, and substance. Hadley (1993) stated that writing involves composition, which entails narrating or retelling ideas in a narrative or descriptive style or changing thoughts into texts such as explanatory or argument writing. Klimova (2014) also considered writing one of the most difficult linguistic abilities to acquire and instruct. It is supported by Heaton (1975), who stated that writing is a complex skill and sometimes difficult to teach. Hence, writing is the most challenging and distinct from other language skills, such as speaking, where errors are acceptable as long as the message is understood. Even though writing is difficult, it allows students to express themselves, communicate with people, and learn something new.

The researchers have interviewed some students of the Muhammadiyah University of Palopo to identify the challenges experienced by students in English class, especially in writing skills. The result indicated that the majority of the students avoid writing abilities. Some factors that cause anxiety in students are the lack of vocabulary and grammar, an appealing manner of instruction, the organization of ideas, and other related concerns. As a result, most students felt anxious about writing because they worry about their grammar and vocabulary. In addition, students may have problems while learning a foreign language, particularly while writing. According to Brown (2007:156), anxiety is the most significant emotional factor in foreign language acquisition. Therefore, it is one of the problems students face in learning English, particularly in writing.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary describes anxiety as the condition of being apprehensive or scared that something bad may happen. Furthermore, Horwitz et.al. (1986) defines language anxiety as the subjective experience of tension, worry, and nervousness that frequently arises spontaneously from the central nervous system. It has emerged as one of the most significant obstacles for Indonesian English learners. It was proved by some findings in previous studies, such as the study by Wahyuni and Uman (2017), which showed that more than half of the students experienced high-level anxiety in English writing. The same finding comes from Hartono and Mega (2019) and Ariyanti (2017), who also stated that students are anxious about English learning, especially in writing. Indeed, this circumstance is extremely disadvantageous because anxiety has been shown to connect significantly with academic performance (Tran et al, 2013; Susanto et al, 2022; Wajdi, 2018). Students with a high level of anxiety in language learning, including writing, are more likely to do poorly and fail in learning languages. Conversely, students who experience low levels of writing or language learning anxiety have a greater likelihood of success. Practically, anxiety affects the outcome of language acquisition.

Therefore, psychologists, language teachers, and researchers pay great attention to it. Cheng (2004), in his article, clearly defined three types of students' English writing anxiety. They are cognitive, somatic, and avoidance behavior. The first category, Cognitive anxiety, concerns the psychological aspects of anxiety, such as negative ideas, anxiety symptoms, and self-perception concerns. At the same time, somatic anxiety is the perception of anxiety's physiological manifestations, such as muscle tension and anxiousness. Then, avoidance behavior is such an anxiousness in students to avoid writing.

Anxiety may appear in various ways. Frequently, overwhelming fear accompanied by chest pain, shortness of breath, headache, discomfort, etc., characterizes anxiety. Anxiety can emerge as unwanted, recurrent thoughts and seemingly uncontrollable compulsions. Occasionally, anxiety is related to a

specific situation, such as public speaking or writing. Many people consider that anxiousness is an added burden for students. Dixon (2015) pursues numerous anxiety symptoms involving the body, thoughts, and attitudes or behavior. When someone feels anxious, their body is typically evidenced by some signs. The signs might include rapidity of respiration increases, feeling ill and requiring the toilet, accelerating heart rate, nervousness, dizziness, sweat suddenly, the mouth feeling dry, and swallowing becoming difficult. Related to mind, someone who thinks anxiety is typically indicated by signs such as trying to convince himself that he is ill, or he is experiencing a heart attack or even a stroke or going insane, being frightened, or fearing that he may lose control and will embrace himself. While related to attitude or behavior, someone who feels anxious is typically evident by signs such as leaving edgy places or situations quickly. End up making excuses to stop going out and doing stuff, may consume a beverage, or take a stroll to avoid public transport and cross the street to prevent people.

Previously, there has been some research discussing students' anxiety in writing.

Unfortunately, most of the research only studied English major or English study program students writing anxiety, as what has been done by Zhang (2011), Wahyuni and Umam (2017), Hartono and Mega (2019), Syarifuddin (2020), Solangi and Lohar (2021), Lestari (2023).

. Whereas the requirement to master English writing skills is not only for English major students themselves but also English for general (EG) and English for specific purposes (ESP) students. ESP is carried out to provide students with a particular degree of English proficiency in preparation for a context known as target needs in which the language will be employed, including English writing. Paltridge and Starfield (2012) stated that there is a need for ESP ideas of literacy and writing practice to address the problems raised by critical views of literacy and education. Hence, it will be crucial to comprehend the condition of ESP students' anxiety in English writing and the major factors that contribute to finding the appropriate way to overcome the students' English writing anxiety.

Based on the background explained above, the researchers are interested in conducting a study regarding the analysis of students' English writing the first-year students of the accounting study program of Muhammadiyah University of Palopo academic year 2021-2022, which focus on the level of students' anxiety in English writing and factors caused the students' English writing anxiety.

2. Method

This study applied the descriptive quantitative method. The population was the accounting study program students of Muhammadiyah University of Palopo which consisted of three classes in which the total number of students was 91. In deciding the sample, the researcher applied a random sampling technique by taking 48 students randomly after calculating the appropriate number to be a study sample based on Slovin's theory with an error tolerance of 10%.

The instruments consisted of two kinds of surveys. The first questionnaire was derived from Cheng's (2014) Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), which has 22 questions. Unfortunately, only 21 of the 22 statements were genuine and designed to determine students' English writing anxiety levels. This questionnaire was divided into three sections: cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior. The second questionnaire, developed from Rezaei and Jafari's Causes of Second Language Writing Fear Inventory (CSLWAI) in 2014 and comprised ten questions, was designed to determine the major reason for the student's English writing anxiety. Before using the questionnaire, the researcher did a validity and reliability test to ensure that the questionnaires were valid and reliable for collecting the data for the study. The validity and reliability test result were analyzed by using the SPSS 20 program. Then, the questionnaire is filled out by the sample or responder when all the items are valid and trustworthy.

To disclose the degree of students' English writing anxiety, the data from the first questionnaire, the SLWAI by Cheng, is examined and scored to determine the mean and frequency as the foundation for concluding. Then, to find out the causes of students' English writing anxiety, the researchers analyzed and calculated the data from the second questionnaire. CSLWAI by Jafari and Rezaei (2014) by multiplying each counting result by each questionnaire point. Finally, the result was multiplied by the Likert scale, and the entire score was added to calculate the percentage. As a result, ten anxiety

reasons scored from one to ten, with the largest proportion being the major causes of students' English writing anxiety.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Students' Anxiety in English Writing

The analytical result in determining the degree of students' English writing anxiety based on the SLWAI questionnaire is presented in table 1 below.

Table 1 The Level of Students' English Writing Anxiety

	Number of students	Minimum scores	Maximal scores	Mean	Percentage
High Anxiety	37	66	88	$76.3 \geq 65$	77%
Moderate Anxiety	10	56	65	$62.2 \leq 65$	21%
Low Anxiety	1	45	45	$46.0 \leq 65$	2%
Total	48	167	198	72.75	100%

The information in table 1 showed that there were 37 or 77% of students ($M=76.3 \geq 65$) experienced a high level of anxiety; 10 or 21% of students ($M=62.2 \leq 65$) experienced a moderate or mid-level of anxiety; and 1 or 2% of the students ($M=45.00 \leq 65$) experienced a low level of English writing anxiety. Furthermore, the total mean score of the questionnaire result was 72.75, with scores from 45 to 88 which means that the mean score was higher than 65 ($72.75 \geq 65$). Based on the percentage and the total mean score, it can be concluded that the students' writing anxiety level were high.

3.2 Primary Causes of English Writing Anxiety the Students

Based on the CWAI questionnaire calculation results. Table 2 summarizes and organizes the sources of students' English writing anxiety.

Table 2 Primary Causes of Students' English Writing Anxiety

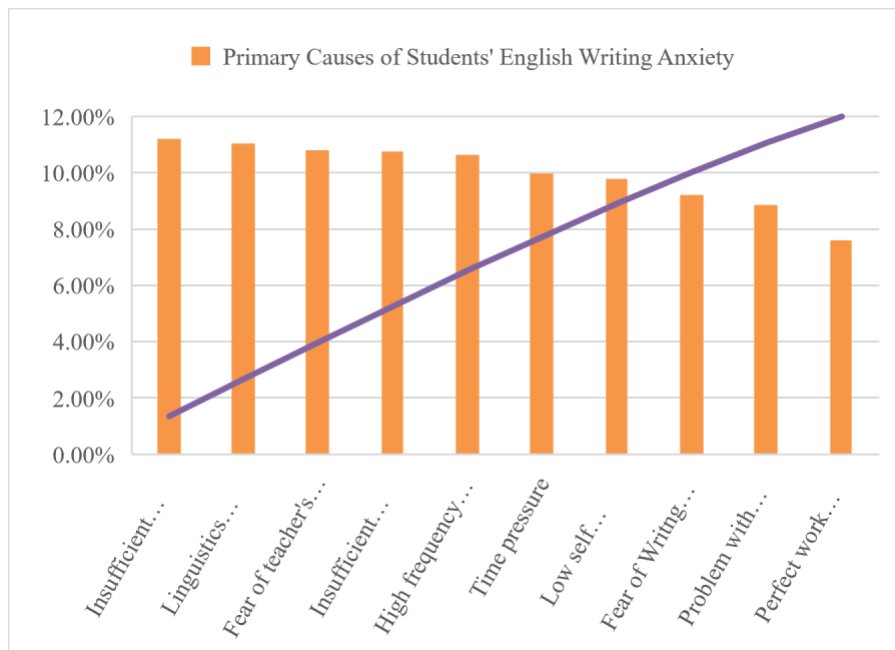


Table 2 presented that the causes of English writing anxiety of the students are insufficient writing technique (11.22%), time pressure (11.06%), linguistic difficulties (10.81%), insufficient writing practice (10.78), fear of teacher's negative comment (10.65%), high frequency of writing task

(9.98%), low self-confidence (9.80%), fear of writing test (9.22%), a problem with the topic (8.86%), and perfect work pressure (7.62%).

The principal causes of students' writing concerns in the accounting study program at the Muhammadiyah University of Palopo, which account for the largest percentage of all reasons, are weak writing techniques and time constraints. Insufficient writing techniques include word composition, developing skills, and customized spellings. While time constraints are a significant factor in English writing since learners must prepare, compose, arrange, and review their English papers for them to be accepted, and these tasks require additional time.

This study aims to determine the extent and key reasons for writing anxiety among accounting students at the Muhammadiyah University of Palopo. The overall mean score on the SLWAI was $M=72.7565$, indicating that students' English writing anxiety was high. Moreover, poor writing methods (11.22 percent), language challenges (11.06 percent), insufficient writing practice (10.78 percent), and time pressure (10.65 percent) are the key reasons for the English writing anxiety of the students. The inadequate writing method became the first key reason for the student's English writing anxiety because the students do not have enough expertise in writing English. Therefore, they are constantly concerned while they are writing. Furthermore, they fall short in learning writing composition and developing writing skills.

This study's findings are comparable to those of Wahyuni and Uman (2017) and Syarifuddin (2020). The researchers discovered that the kids' writing anxiety is high. In their study of Analysis on Writing Anxiety of Indonesian EFL College Learners, Wahyuni and Uman (2017) discovered that 54 percent of students have a high level of writing anxiety. In contrast, Syarifuddin (2020) found, using a descriptive quantitative method design, that the total mean is 65.8565, indicating that the students have a high level of writing anxiety. Zhang (2011) conducted yet another investigation. He contrasted first-year and second-year students' English writing anxiety. This study's findings are comparable to those of Wahyuni and Uman (2017) and Syarifuddin (2020). The researchers discovered that the kids' writing anxiety is high. In their study of Analysis on Writing Anxiety of Indonesian EFL College Learners, Wahyuni and Uman (2017) discovered that 54 percent of students have a high level of writing anxiety. In contrast, Syarifuddin (2020) found, using a descriptive quantitative method design, that the total mean is 65.8565, indicating that the students have a high level of writing anxiety. Zhang (2011) conducted yet another investigation. He contrasted first-year and second-year students' English writing anxiety.

However, this study found a distinct explanation for students' writing anxiety. According to both Wahyuni and Uman (2017) and Syarifuddin (2020) investigations, the major reason for students' writing anxiety is language challenges, which has the largest proportion of causes of students' writing anxiety. The investigation done by Mary and Joseph yielded the same results (2017). The linguistic difficulties found by them are related to the difficulties in vocabulary and grammar. Most of the students in the Syarifuddin's survey (82%) stated that their writing anxiety related to their linguistic problems in terms of lack of vocabulary mastery and sentence structure. In contrast, both grammar and vocabulary are crucial components in writing. To generate effective writing, students must learn a wide range of vocabulary. They must also be able to employ suitable diction in a certain setting.

In contrast to previous research, this study's major source of students' English writing anxiety differs. This study's most common causes are weak writing methods and time constraints. On the other hand, the pressure to produce flawless work was the least important influence on students' writing anxiety. The study suggests that the major reasons for writing anxiety in kids are unique and may be due to various factors. The instructional approaches used to teach participants how to write in English may influence the outcome of this study. Teaching writing is not only a challenging endeavor but also one that requires inventiveness on the side of teachers. In contrast to previous research, this study's major source of students' English writing anxiety differs. This study's most common causes are weak writing methods and time constraints.

On the other hand, the pressure to produce flawless work was the least important influence on students' writing anxiety. The finding suggests that the major reasons for writing anxiety in kids are unique and may be due to various factors. Rezai and Jafari (2014) found that time constraints are a

significant factor in writing since learners must prepare, compose, arrange, and review their English papers for them to be accepted, and these tasks require additional time. As a result of their inability to concentrate on their writing, students frequently experience anxiety in writing tasks within time constraints.

Before it is graded, students must be given ample time to complete the writing project by following the directions. Furthermore, they are concerned that their English work will be graded poorly. Hence, teachers should diversify their teaching strategies to reduce students' grade anxiety. Ungraded writing activities are possible. Furthermore, the students also lack an understanding of English writing composition, which causes them to worry.

Meanwhile, they are concerned with language concerns such as a lack of vocabulary, sentence structures, grammatical faults, etc. Therefore, teachers should not provide timed writing assignments to alleviate students' high writing anxiety levels. Sharp, referenced in Rima (2013), proposed five classroom teaching techniques for using ungraded writing activities: creative writing, review papers, sample paper revisions compared to a paradigm, drafts with a customized conference, and journals. Ungraded writing tasks may assist pupils in overcoming their fear of writing in English.

In conclusion, writing anxiety negatively correlates with writing achievement among students. When students cannot enjoy the writing process, they will write under time limitations, reducing their ability to achieve at their highest level. Anxiety is a sensation of dread about something that is about to occur or has already happened and constant preoccupation with it. It may also be a strong desire to complete a task and a fear of failure. It is associated with unease, despair, and low self-esteem. The learners themselves are the ones who need to find solutions to these situations. Those factors are well beyond the students' control. Consequently, students need to get used to and adapt to these conditions.

4. Conclusion

Based on the facts and discussion above, it can be stated that accounting students at the Muhammadiyah University of Palopo have a high degree of English writing anxiety. The fundamental source of the students' concern is a lack of writing skills. At the same time, the least significant factor of students' writing anxiety was the pressure for perfect work. Writing anxiety negatively correlates with writing achievement among students. When students cannot enjoy the writing process, they will write under time limitations, reducing their ability to achieve at their highest level. Anxiety is a sensation of dread about something that is about to occur or has already occurred and constant preoccupation with it.

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