

Factors Associated with EFL Engineering Students' Anxiety in Writing

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ABSTRACT

Anxiety is familiar to university students which is considered one of the factors that can limit their performance in learning a second or foreign language. Anxiety is defined as a feeling of discomfort, uneasiness, and nervousness in the language-learning process in the classroom. This study attempted to identify the key elements influencing the writing anxiety of EFL engineering students. 50 engineering students from a university in Malang, East Java, Indonesia, participated in this study. In order to gather data, the researcher spread a questionnaire to the students. Next, she performed an interview to probe further into the data. The finding showed that the students' anxiety in writing was affected by some factors, such as students' self-efficacy, self-confidence, and many other factors. The researcher gave a suggestion to study the role of gender and age in the future study.

Keywords: anxiety; EFL students; factors; writing

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a process as a means of communication. People can express their thoughts, accomplishments, dreams, and opinions through writing. People from various origins and across boundaries can communicate via writing and cross barriers. Writing is of the utmost significance to EFL students. It is a survival skill because children must use it to complete their homework and other coursework in addition to speaking with their teachers at last (Choi, 2013; Olanezhad, 2015).

Anxiety is familiar to university students which is considered one of the factors that can limit their performance in learning a foreign language. Like other educational settings, EFL settings grapple with the problem of anxiety in foreign language teaching across several linguistic domains. When learning a language in a classroom, anxiety is a state of unease, uneasiness, and anxiousness. From all anxieties, Second Language Writing Anxiety (SLWA) is seen to have serious consideration. According to Reno et al. (1980), writing anxiety appears to be very situation-specific, self-limiting, observable, and—more importantly—relatively amenable to treatment with reasoned instruction. One or more thoughts, emotions, or behaviors that make it challenging for someone to start, continue, or finish a writing assignment that they are intellectually competent of accomplishing are referred to as having writing anxiety (Al-Sawalha & Chow, Thomas, 2012). In addition, Rezaei & Jafari (2014) said that what stands out in the concepts of writing anxiety is the presence of a scenario or environment that triggers unfavorable emotions like tension and worry.

Anxiety is divided into three criteria. Woodrow (2006) mentioned that trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety are the three types of anxiety. People with trait anxiety may experience anxiety under many circumstances. Those who have trait anxiety are frequently and persistently anxious in a range of circumstances. State anxiety is recognized as a transient emotion; it does not last forever, especially in the context of school. State anxiety and anxiety related to foreign languages can both be comprehended. Finally, anxiety that is only present in circumstances is a trait. Like a trait, situation-specific anxiety only occurs in a single environment or circumstance.

Besides, there are other categories of anxiety. According to Alpert & Haber (1960), Anxiety can be categorized as either debilitating or facilitative. The first type is in a detrimental fashion where the students may struggle to focus, be unwilling or willing but not want to engage in the in-class activity. The second kind, on the other hand, encourages pupils to learn more and become ready for

lessons or tests. This current study focused on the first type, where the anxiety could avoid the students to get their best performance in writing.

Many studies have been conducted to know the causes of writing anxiety. Kara (2013) concentrated on the elements that affect writing anxiety in ESL environments. According to the author, the lack of writing experience, practice, familiarity with crucial methods, ineffective course materials, and insufficient feedback all played a part in the students' writing anxiety.

As EFL learners, the students of the National Institute of Technology (ITN) Malang have some difficulties in writing English. It was shown by the writing scores in the class that were intended to be low. Anxiety was one of the reasons for this condition. The researcher attempted to answer this question by conducting a study named "Factors Associated with EFL Engineering Students' Anxiety in Writing. The researcher in this study would like to categorize the severity of the students' writing anxiety before finding the elements influencing it. This study was considered essential since one of the English subject's learning achievements at ITN Malang is the students have an ability in written skills.

METHODS

This study was conducted at the ITN Malang, East Java, Indonesia. As the study's participants, second-semester civil engineering students took part. This study concentrated on several variables influencing students' worry regarding their writing abilities.

Qualitative research was conducted by using two questionnaires and an interview as the instrument. The researcher's role was as the lecturer in the process of data collection.

SLWAI (The Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory) which has 22 items in a form of questionnaire created by Cheng (2004) was used regarding the initial questionnaire. The result of this questionnaire determined the main type of the student's anxiety levels in writing. In this questionnaire, the items were including three subscales: (1) somatic anxiety, (2) cognitive anxiety, and (3) avoidance behavior. Somatic anxiety manifested as unfavorable emotions like tightness. Negative expectations and an obsession with performance were symptoms of cognitive anxiety. While avoidance in writing was a reflection of avoidance behavior. This questionnaire used a Likert-type 5-choice format of responses which means 1 to 5 for strongly disagreed, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree respectively. Cognitive Anxiety was belonging to (1,3,7,9,14,17,20,21), Somatic Anxiety was belonging to (2,6,8,11,13,15,19), and Avoidance Behavior was belonging to (4,5,10,12,16,18,22) items.

The second survey, which comprised of 10 questions derived from the SCLWAI (Causes of Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory), was adopted from (Rezaei & Jafari, 2014b). The result of this questionnaire would reveal the strong reasons the students got anxiety in writing.

After getting all data from the questionnaire, the researcher would conduct an interview in order to strengthen the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Anxiety Level

The lowest score allowed in SLWAI was 22, and the highest score allowed was 110. Table 1 showed that the students' score range was 40 to 91.

TABLE 1. Descriptive statistics of the SLWAI

	Number of Participants	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
High Anxiety	31 (62%)	76	91
Moderate Anxiety	9 (18%)	58	75
Low Anxiety	10 (20%)	40	57

In accordance with the data, 31 students, or 62% of the class, reported having writing anxiety in a high level, while to 9 and 10 students, who reported having moderate and low levels, respectively.

The Causes of Writing Anxiety

Answering the question of the caused of writing anxiety, the researcher used the following questioner with 10 items of questions.

TABLE 2. Causes of Writing Anxiety

	Number of Participants
Fear of being criticized by the teacher	3
Being afraid of tests	4
Poor writing skills due to a lack of writing experience	1
issues in choosing the topic and linguistic issues	
Pressure to produce flawless results	3
Fear of being criticized by the teacher	2
Fear of the instructor's criticism	11
dread of taking exams	2
Time constraints	7
Numerous writing assignments every week	1
a lack of confidence in one's writing	16

Table 2 showed the number of students' responses in each question related to the factors caused them got trouble in writing which was triggering their anxiety. All items were filled by the students with different number. The two main elements affecting the student's anxiousness were low writing self-confidence and linguistic challenges.

The data gained from the students with anxiety in writing showed that they were having trouble in self-confidence to write because they had low self-efficacy. From the first time, they thought that they had a low proficiency in English, especially writing skills. Some students mentioned:

- *I am not good in building paragraph because I am not good in English.*
- *I am afraid to make silly mistake.*
- *Writing is very hard for me so that I make some errors in grammatical.*
- *I have low comprehension in writing, that is why I made some mistakes.*
- *I have minimum vocabularies to help me in writing.*
- *The environment in writing is not as comfortable as in speaking. It makes me feel nervous.*

Besides, some students told the researcher that the way the lecturer create an environment in writing class also influenced them in managing their anxiety as the following statement:

- *I am aware of my poor writing abilities., but seeing my lecturer gave the instruction without any smile make it worse because I felt frustrated.*

The opposite statement was given by other students that support the above idea:

- *In my opinion my lecturer was fun type. She likes to make some jokes when the class was stiff. It made me relax in writing.*
- *However, my lecturer helped me relax when she was smiling to me.*

In addition, one of the students also said that they got nervous in writing English because he still saw it as something new. He said: *writing is hard for me because usually I only read some passages or answer some questions, miss. It is new for me.*

Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to know some factors affecting the EFL higher students' writing anxiety. Yet, the first action the researcher did was revealing the degree of writing anxiety among students.

The National Institute of Technology (ITN) Malang's writing anxiety was still an issue, according to the results of the SLWAI survey where 62% of the participants were classified with high anxiety (HA). This result was similar with some previous studies that showed the level of student's writing anxiety was still high (Sri Wahyuni, 2017; Jebreil et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, the results above were different from a study conducted by Ekmekçi (2018) that showed 60% of his participant students got moderate writing anxiety. Yet, that data was gained from different circumstances from this current study. Ekmekçi's participants were from English education department students, and English was not an EFL but an ESL in their country. Of course, these differences must be studied further.

However, to some extent, some people still see writing anxiety would not be as massive as spoken skill since the content and message created had been decided. Nevertheless, some data exposed showed that most students both from English department and non-English department that saw English as an ESL and EFL have mild to severe writing anxiety. The mentioned results must lead future researchers to see a big need of consideration to solve a problem related with writing anxiety.

The following data in this study focused on the components that contribute to writing anxiety, and they revealed that both internal and external factors played a part. This study showed that the internal component was the main contributing factor. Internal factors that significantly affected the students' performance were low writing self-confidence and a lack of self-efficacy. These factors positively related to their linguistic comprehension. The students with low self-esteem and high self-efficacy thought that they had a lack of linguistic capability, such as lack of vocabularies. This result was corroborated by a study conducted by Y. Cheng (2004). He succeeded in doing study for college students and discovered that self-perceptions, personal ideas about writing and learning to write, and learning styles were some elements affecting students' writing anxiety. It was strengthened by Sabti et al. (2019) that mentioned a relationship between students' self-efficacy and performance in writing positively. They said that a higher self-efficacy and motivation in writing would create a better writing performance.

The prominent external factors influencing the students in building their writing anxiety were the lecturer's action and the time given to write. According to the students in the interview, the lecturer seems less interacting despite giving an instruction in writing class. This made the students feel nauseous, nervous, and under pressure. It blocked their idea in smoothing their writing. Furthermore, the time limit given also made them more anxious in doing their writing. These data showed how much an attitude of a lecturer and also how they could create an interesting writing learning environment could affect the students' level of anxiety. In line with this result, Y. Cheng (2004) in his study suggested that a less stressful learning environment needed to be created in order to help the students doing all assignment at ease that could help them gaining their best performance.

Limitation

This study was focusing on factors affecting the students' writing anxiety, but the researcher did not make any specific categorization in gender and age for the participants. Therefore, it was suggested that the future study could use both variables in the next study.

CONCLUSION

Writing is a complex process for EFL learners where anxiety was considered as a factor influencing their writing performance. This study found out that some internal and external factors played big role, especially a low writing confidence and strong self-efficacy. Since writing anxiety is still a problem for EFL higher education students, it was advised that further research be done by taking into account factors including gender, age, educational background, and the status of English in the nation.

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