

## SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING ANXIETY OF INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

*This research reported the types, as well as the causal factors of writing anxiety experienced by 44 volunteered Indonesian student writers from the first and second year of college. This research applied two questionnaires to get descriptions of types and causal factors of writing anxiety; Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) and Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory (CWAI), and interview. The findings show that cognitive anxiety is found to be the most experienced type of writing anxiety among both students' levels. There is a slight difference in the result of CWAI questionnaire in that three major causal factors of freshmen writing anxiety are language difficulties, time pressure, and insufficient writing practice. Meanwhile, the causal factors of sophomores are insufficient writing practice, language difficulties, and insufficient writing technique. These suggest that classroom instructions need to gear on improving students' linguistic capabilities and writing techniques through modeling.*

**Keywords:** writing anxiety, cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, avoidance behavior, CWAI

### INTRODUCTION

Spielberger as cited in Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) defines anxiety as a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with the arousal of the automatic nervous system. Learning English for foreign language learners constantly provokes anxiety. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) who have proposed the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) in 1986, are the most cited experts discussing FLA. Foreign Language Anxiety is a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). This anxiety causes English learners sometimes difficult to comprehend materials, avoid taking writing class (Cheng, 2002), and even to hinder the progress of development of their L2 academic works' productions (Kurt & Atay, 2007). Anxiety in EFL contexts causes students to be less engaged in learning (Pappamihel, 2002). Possibly, this leads to negative impacts on their performance (Kondo & Ling, 2004).

It is undeniable that writing in English for almost all foreign language learners is a tough case. There are some challenges students shall usually face when performing writing in the L2 like English. Chamot (2005) identifies that

beginning level students struggle with finding the words they need and remembering grammatical conventions, whereas more advanced students find it difficult to link their ideas with coherence and to produce appropriate target language discourse. Besides, ideas blockage that is experienced by both novice and professional writers also plays a substantial role in why writing can be a challenging task.

In classrooms, the fear of negative evaluation by the teachers and peers and worry about timed-writing even make the students harder to develop their English writing skills. Writing anxiety phenomenon is indeed not the only individual but also classical in a way that it deals with instruction, teachers, and tasks (Daly & Wilson, 1983). This highlights the fact that classrooms act as provoking places where anxiety is initiated and grows.

Initially, the exploration of foreign language anxiety only focuses on the area of speaking, which is believed as a skill that most frequently evokes anxiety among the students. At present, there have been a number of research that discusses anxiety on other skills, for instance in speaking or oral performance (Gkonou, 2014; Liu, 2006; Woodrow, 2006), listening (Chang, 2008; Lu & Liu, 2015), reading and listening (Chow, Chiu, & Wong, 2017). However, writing anxiety is considered less researched compares to other skills (Gkonou, 2011). Furthermore, to the best of the knowledge, research of writing anxiety carried in

the Indonesian context is scarcely reported. This research reports an understanding of the Indonesian learners' writing anxiety in one of the Indonesian universities located in East Java. Exploring the anxiety they face while learning writing in classroom signifies the urgent call for the description about how classroom situation leads to anxiety.

Thompson as cited in Lan, Hung, and Hsu (2011) explains writing anxiety as a fear of the writing process that outweighs the projected gain from the ability to write. Hassan (2001) states writing anxiety as situational-specific anxiety which is defined as a general avoidance of writing and of situations perceived by the individuals to potentially require some amount of writing accompanied by the potential for evaluation of that writing. Usually, the condition of writing anxiety will get worse when the students are required to write in the language other than their first language. It is because clearly, second language writing is strategically, rhetorically, and linguistically different in important ways from L1 writing (Silva, 1993). The important ways include content, organization, vocabulary, and language use.

The construct of Second Language Writing Anxiety is understood to be classified under three subscales; cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior (Cheng, 2004). He agrees that cognitive anxiety refers to learners' mental aspect when they experience anxiety, including negative expectations, preoccupation with performance, and concern about others' perceptions. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) believe that anxiety consumes cognitive resources because when a learner becomes anxious, he/she initiates negative self-related cognition such as 'thoughts of failure' (e.g., "I will never be able to do this."), self-deprecation (e.g., "I am just no good at this."), and avoidance (e.g., "I wish this was over.").

Somatic anxiety refers to one's perception of the physiological effects of anxiety. Learners with somatic anxiety are shown to increase their autonomic arousal and unpleasant feeling states such as nervousness and tension. They tend to sweat, shake, and increase their heart rate, suffer a headache, and rapid breathing. Meanwhile, avoidance behavior refers to the behavioral aspect when the learners are anxious. Learners with avoidance behavior, for instance, will find ways and situations so that they do not have to write in English or to write compositions and to write compositions, not in the classroom.

To explain why this writing anxiety appears, there are causes of writing anxiety inventory (Rezaei & Jafari, 2014). It is to classify ten factors, which can evoke writing anxiety among the students. First is fear of the teacher's negative evaluation. Watson and Friend as cited in Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1991) define fear of negative evaluation as apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and expectation that others will evaluate oneself negatively. Because of this learners feel uncomfortable being watched by peers and teachers (Na, 2007), and feel afraid of losing face (Ohata, 2005).

Second is fear of tests. This is rooted in fear of negative evaluation. Learners are fear of negative consequences of poor grade (Ohata, 2005). In most educational settings, tests are assigned via writing. Learners are anxious because they know that their writing will be judged based on ideas elaboration, argument development, vocabulary variety usage, and texts' aesthetic quality (Leki as cited in Öztürk & Çecen, 2007). Third is spelling, syntax, morphology, and mechanics also burden learners and evoke writing anxiety (Raisman as cited in Öztürk & Çecen, 2007).

Fourth is insufficient writing practice leads learners

to focus more on the form. When learners focus more on forms, they will experience more writing apprehension (Gunge & Tayler, 1989 as cited in Shawish & Abdelraheem, 2010). Unskillful writers who do not possess a fairly good understanding of the process of composing and skill or technique of writing will suffer from poor writing performance (Daud, Daud, & Kassim, 2005). Fifth is the problem with topic choice. Bachman and Palmer as cited in Zhang (2011) say that low level of topical knowledge causes writers to suffer anxiety. Learners who are instructed to write about the politics of which is a topic he/she is not familiar with will experience anxiety more compare to those who are more familiar with politics.

Sixth is a linguistic difficulty. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) find that foreign language learners have high anxiety because of language difficulties. Challenges in vocabulary, grammar rules, and idea flow impede writing performance. Seventh is pressure for perfect work. The self-imposed pressure for perfect work usually makes learners experience writing anxiety. Thinking about the difficult standard and hard works that await put more anxiety to learners. Along with low self-confidence in writing, learners experience high anxiety (Marwan, 2007). Ninth is time pressure. Writing in English undeniably requires longer time because writers need to display the flow of ideas in L2. Learners need extra time to plan, write, and revise their composition. If time is limited, learners usually feel insecure and failure. The tenth is the high frequency of writing assignments. This causal factor is present though in a small percentage (Rezaei & Jafari, 2014).

This research envisages anxiety from two different levels of learners, freshmen and sophomores to get detailed descriptions on what type of anxiety and their causal factors of anxiety in their first and second year English learning in Indonesian college. These years usually are the initial years that focus on the sharpening of college learners' language skills. As classroom research, this research aims at profiling student writers' types of anxiety and their causes. This research does not focus on differences of the academic level, yet highlights the classroom context of both levels where participants take writing courses and its implications on the arousal of writing anxiety. This research focuses on two research questions. First is what are types of writing anxiety experienced by the participants. Second is how each type of writing anxiety plays roles in the participants' learning writing. This research will also try to provide some pedagogical implications of the research in relation to writing anxiety of EFL learners for classroom use.

## METHODS

This research uses a mixed-method research approach in a way that it combines elements of quantitative and qualitative approach to gain the depth, breadth, and corroboration of the data (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). On the quantitative strand, the participants of this research are selected on the basis of probabilistic or random sampling as all members have an equal chance to be selected. Meanwhile for the qualitative strand, purposeful sampling is used with a consideration that the selection is made based on a criterion of participants that have experienced a central phenomenon being explored in this research (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

There are 44 Indonesian English Foreign Language (EFL) student writers over 131 students from one of

universities in eastern part of Java that signed on the consent form to participate in this research. They took the writing course in the first and second year of their undergraduate degree. These participants are female and male students aged 18-19 years old. They are two classes that participate in the research. Writing 01 course is a course offered for freshmen. This course is aimed to equip students with how to write sentences by comprehending the parts of speech and their functions. Writing 03 course, on the other hand, is offered for sophomores. Students are able to take this course after they pass Writing 01, Writing 02 (advanced sentence building for instance complex, compound sentences, and how functions relate and build sentence meaning). Writing 03 focuses on paragraphs writing, especially academic essay. Their level of English proficiency is around pre-intermediate based on the initial placement test assigned by the university.

The present research uses two kinds of questionnaires as the source of data. The first questionnaire is Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory or SLWAI (Cheng, 2004). SLWAI consists of 22 items, of which are designed to assess the level and the type of anxiety of the students. SLWAI is used as a measure of writing anxiety because it has been proved highly reliable and valid (Cheng, 2004). SLWAI has good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha coefficient reported of 0,91 (Cheng, 2004) and is widely used as a measure of foreign/second language writing anxiety (Rezaei & Jafari, 2014).

The second questionnaire used is Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory or CWAI (Rezaei & Jafari, 2014). This questionnaire consists of 10 items developed based on causes of foreign language writing anxiety. CWAI questionnaire for now as it is found is a reliable tool for identifying causal factors of EFL writing anxiety as it is developed from classroom observation and the summary of previous research available on this issue. Both questionnaires apply a Likert-type 5-choice response format; 1 (strongly agree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly disagree). The questionnaires items are translated into Bahasa Indonesia so that the participants can understand each item without linguistic constraints and give correct responses towards the questionnaires. This also increases the trustworthiness of the data.

For data collection, the researchers hand over two questionnaires to the students after obtaining the signed participants' consent forms. The questionnaires are given to the participants promptly after they finish their final writing examination. The two questionnaires are taken at home to let the participants pay sufficient attention to the contents of the questionnaires. The collection of questionnaires is made shortly the next day after it is distributed to minimize the biased results. It is also done to consider excessive test anxiety after the examination, but still, the students can feel the atmosphere of fear of writing test (as one of the causal factors of EFL writing anxiety) as they do the exam on the same day as they answer the questionnaires.

After the data have been collected, coded, and tabulated, SPSS version 2.0 is used to analyze the results of the type of writing anxiety and its causal factors. Afterward, the interview is assigned to nine selected participants who, according to the statistical analysis on the SLWAI questionnaire, belong to the high, moderate, and low level of anxiety. The maximum score of SLWAI is 110, and the minimum is 22. This is to say that participants scored above 65 are grouped into high anxious, and those scored below 50 is low anxious. Meanwhile, those scored

in between is moderate anxious. The interview is aimed at clarifying and exploring the data of causal factors of writing anxiety (CWAI) to give the description of experiences and perspectives of the participants from three different levels of anxiety. The interview along with the results of SLWAI and CWAI are then interpreted descriptively to allow pictures of how participants experience anxiety and how anxiety plays a role in their learning English writing.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the data of the questionnaires and interviews, the researchers have found the types of writing anxiety of cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior experienced by the participants in their learning writing. Further findings of each kind of writing anxiety are described in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1 Writing Anxiety of Sophomores

	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cognitive	24	72,83	3,03	0,68
Somatic	24	69,00	2,88	0,78
Avoidance	24	53,86	2,24	0,59

Table 2 Writing Anxiety of Freshmen

	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cognitive	20	62,91	3,16	0,67
Somatic	20	59,30	2,97	0,71
Avoidance	20	43,12	2,16	0,76

Based on the SPSS descriptive statistics, cognitive anxiety for the sophomores presents the sum of 72,83 and the mean score of 3,03 which means that cognitive anxiety is significantly the highest if compares with other subscales/ types. Hence, cognitive anxiety is determined as the most common type of foreign language writing anxiety faced by the majority of sophomore students.

The finding of this research is different from the previous research from Min and Rahmat (2014). In their research, somatic anxiety comes as the most dominant type. However, three previous research from Cheng (2004), Rezaei and Jafari (2014), and also Zhang (2011) have stated that cognitive anxiety is as the most common type. Min and Rahmat (2014) have suggested that the difference in result may occur because of the divergent type of respondents. The participants of four research from Cheng, Zhang, Rezaei and Jafari, as well as this research, are from non-technical department based students; meanwhile, Min and Rahmat's participants are from technical department students who are not good enough to be able to handle nervousness and tensions (Min & Rahmat, 2014).

The dimensions of writing anxiety as presented in Table 2 show that cognitive anxiety is also the most dominant type of writing anxiety among the freshmen. It marks the highest sum (62,91) and the highest mean (3,16) as compared to other subscales, somatic and avoidance. Cognitive anxiety is any mental activities in

the human brain, and it refers to learners' mental aspect. They experience anxiety, including negative expectations, preoccupation with performance, and concern about others' perceptions (Cheng, 2004). Students with cognitive anxiety have high pressure of tests and evaluation on EFL writing (Zhang, 2011).

When cognitive anxiety is found as the most common type, it means the students give a lot of attention to the external factors, such as peers or teachers' evaluation on the students' writing (Cheng, 2004). The cognitive behaviors of the students when they are writing English compositions are very diverse. Some of the participants have mentioned in the interview that they feel worried and uneasy when they know that their compositions are evaluated and discussed together in classrooms. The participants are afraid of their classmates to deride their English writing compositions. They add that they are afraid if their English compositions will be scored bad. Cognitive anxiety plays a great influence in disturbing students when they are composing English writing at hand. Students will be more anxious when they overburden themselves to perform writing without mistakes both linguistically and content-based. Negative thoughts, such as the thought of failure in writing, self-deprecation, and avoidance make worse their anxiety. This suggests that students suffering cognitive anxiety must fight against several negative factors that come from outside. Moreover, they must be able to learn to control their minds, so that they can minimize their anxiety levels.

The second focus of this research discusses the causes of writing anxiety experienced by the participants. In this second section, some implications from the findings are also discussed. Results of CWAI questionnaire assigned to the participants can be seen in Figure 1.

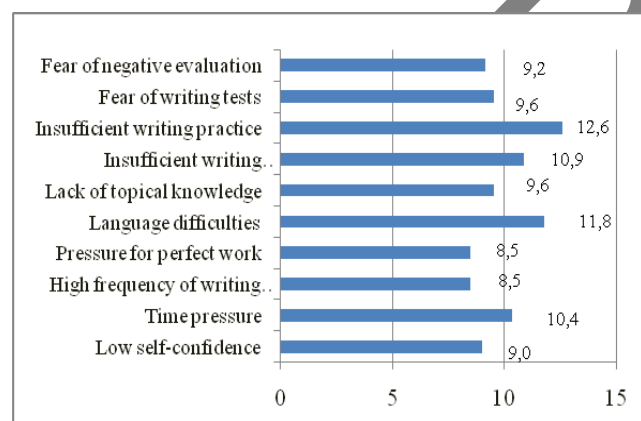


Figure 1 Causes of EFL Writing Anxiety of Sophomores

Figure 1 shows the result of CWAI from sophomore participants. As can be seen in Figure 1, the primary causal factor of writing anxiety among the participants is insufficient writing practices (12,6%). The minimum intensity of writing practice both inside and outside the class is considered as the main source for the foreign language writing anxiety. Based on the questionnaire, participants feel that practices need to be doubled in dosage. Participants with the low level of anxiety experience more writing practice outside the class help them. When asking what writing practice they do, they answer any practices of writing in English including writing captions in Instagram,

Facebook, or other social media. The feeling of getting used to practicing writing help them to boost their confidence to write. Participants with the high level of anxiety have stated that most of the time, they do not know how to put thoughts into good writing. This suggests that practices with models of text can help improve their writing ability and eliminate their anxiety.

Beside insufficient practices, linguistic difficulties present as the second higher causal factor of writing anxiety with 11,8%. The sophomores decide that language difficulties are another cause of experiencing foreign language writing anxiety. From the interview, participants with moderate and high anxiety level of writing observe that correct grammar and structures are their focuses when writing in English. They feel too much burden of worrying about whether their writing is grammatically and structurally correct than whether their moves in the overall writing. This suggests that teacher's way of giving feedback for students' writing needs balancing between the representation of voice and coherent moves among the paragraphs and the feedback on grammatical and structural correctness. Lack of vocabulary, syntactic complexity, and semantic area (i.e., the meaning of words and word parts) also worry the participants resulting in more anxiety experienced.

These findings are consistent with the results of the previous invention, for example, the research result of Zhang (2011), which make clear that the language difficulties is the first main cause of the emergence of writing anxiety on the students. Another finding is from one of the previous research of this research, namely Rezaei and Jafari (2014). Referring to their research, linguistic difficulty is the third source of the cause of writing anxiety among their participants. The similarity of two previous research with this research is that all of them emphasize language difficulties as the common problem typically encountered by students when learning writing in a second language or foreign language. Hence, the students with insufficient practice and lack of experiences in writing often give too much concern on the form. When they are thinking a lot about the form, more anxious they will be.

The third major factor of writing anxiety is insufficient writing technique with 10,9% of the answer. This result is very different from previous research. In Zhang's research (2011), insufficient writing technique comes as the second last factor. The same case happens with Rezaei and Jafari's finding (2014) that insufficient writing technique is the ninth factor of 10 causes of foreign language writing anxiety. Both of the research show that insufficient writing technique is a minor cause, however, in this research, insufficient writing technique is determined as one of the main causal factors of writing anxiety of the sophomores. This suggests that the students have problems in composing process and skill development. Students with insufficient writing technique are easier to be anxious because their anxiety is a result of their poor writing skill's development.

There is a different result between freshmen and sophomores on CWAI. The CWAI result of the freshmen, can be seen in Figure 2.

The result of CWAI questionnaire shows that language difficulties, time pressure, and insufficient writing practice are the chief causal factors of writing anxiety perceived by freshmen participants. Though slightly different in the order of most causal factors of anxiety, both freshmen and sophomores have stated that language difficulties are a major challenge in writing which evokes anxiety.

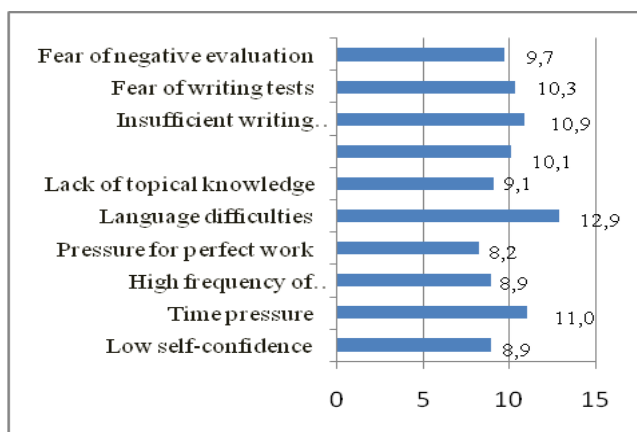


Figure 2 Causes of EFL Writing Anxiety of Freshmen

When asking why language difficulty becomes one of three major causal factors of their writing anxiety, the freshmen participants perceive themselves having lack of experiences of writing in English, having inadequate mastery of vocabulary, committing more grammatical errors, and feeling confused about correct spelling and sentences structures. Because of those linguistic difficulties, they face difficulties in expressing their writing in English, which in the end lead them to experience writing anxiety. This suggests that teacher may put more balanced emphasis on assessing the progress of writing development instead of only focusing on how many mistakes of grammar and structure students make while writing. This paradigm of assessing process along with product may ease students' anxiety.

Time pressure and insufficient writing become two major causes of writing anxiety. From the interview, the participants have observed that they feel that time is one of the enemies in producing good writing. Lack of skills or writing technique apparently contributes to this causal factor of writing anxiety. As they are not so sure of what is good writing, and what to write when asked by the teacher, they feel their anxiety rise. This suggests that teachers should train students on timed writing exercises so the students can practice more and adjust their time for composition.

## CONCLUSIONS

Regardless the academic level of the participants, cognitive anxiety appears as the common type of writing anxiety among the sophomores and the freshmen. The sophomores present cognitive anxiety in the sum of 72,83 and the mean score of 3,03, while the freshmen scored 62,91 for the sum with the mean of 3,16. The causal factors of writing anxiety are insufficient writing practice, language difficulties, insufficient writing technique, and time pressure. These findings show that classrooms instructions may inflict the causes of anxiety arousal of the student writers. Instructions that put the focus on an individual work being contested with others worse these participants' anxiety. This suggests that classroom climate regarding peers interaction and student-teacher interaction holds a significant contributing factor to cognitive anxiety arousal.

This research also shows evidence that students have observed that practices and models of good writing are extremely necessary to lessen anxiety. To optimize the result of writing practices, writing instruction, which

emphasizes both the process and on the product, should be underscored. This helps students see that writing is a process of accentuating voices in a coherent manner. This puts a highlight on classroom voices that writing does not take only correct forms of sentences. More guidance from teachers to enhance writing techniques, training students for timed tests, providing prompts with familiar vocabulary, encouraging students to see that committing mistakes as a part of learning help to lessen students' writing anxiety level.

This research has some limitations. First, the participants in the interview session are small in number. Although this may give the depth and breadth of exploration toward the issue, yet more participants will provide more various findings. Second, because this research does not aim to generalize the findings as it focuses more on how classroom gives impacts to students' writing anxiety, thus to find generalization power, other researchers may take more participants by a survey method. Future research on what instruction assists learners to lessen their writing anxiety will complete the understanding on the application of this research for practical use in classroom.

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