



## Research article

## Pre-service EFL teacher's perceptions of foreign language writing anxiety and some associated factors



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## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Teacher professional development  
Foreign language writing  
EFL  
Pre-service teachers  
Perceptions

## ABSTRACT

Researchers have been striving to investigate the causes and consequences associated with writing anxiety experienced by students of foreign languages. This study aimed to investigate the level and nature of writing anxiety experienced by learners of foreign languages, considering gender as a variable. The study's second goal was to uncover the learners' perspectives on writing anxiety and the factors that contribute to it. The convenience sample method was used to choose seventy-six students to participate in the English language teacher training course. Second Language Writing Anxiety Reasons Inventory (SLWARI) and Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) (Cheng, 2004; Kara, 2013) [1,2] were used in order to determine the levels and types of anxiety that are associated with learners' foreign language writing. Both inventories were used to determine what causes learners' foreign language writing. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of how students perceive the level of anxiety they feel when writing, a semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant. The data showed that there was no difference when taking into account learners' gender concerning their anxiety levels and kinds. The vast majority of individuals reported feeling a significant amount of anxiety. The subjects exhibited cognitive anxiety symptoms, although there were no indications of gender effect. The responses to the interview questions highlighted a deficiency in both writing practice and linguistic expertise as critical contributors to anxious sentiments.

## 1. Introduction

Anxiety regarding one's ability to communicate in a foreign language has been identified as the most significant barrier to learning any foreign language. In the most recent few decades, a significant focus has been placed on investigating potential solutions to this problem. Preliminary research suggests that pupils' natural competitiveness may be a contributing cause of anxiousness. Learners also identify the behaviour of teachers as another possible source of anxiety because teachers often point out students' mistakes and make learning in the classroom more of a performance than a learning opportunity. Anxiety when writing is considered to be an emotional response brought on by the process of learning a foreign language [3–6]. Like test anxiety, language anxiety is described as “a distinct

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e13405>

Received 25 October 2022; Received in revised form 20 January 2023; Accepted 30 January 2023

Available online 2 February 2023

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complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning that arise from the uniqueness of the language learning process" [7]. According to earlier research by Horwitz et al. [8], anxiety is a threat that cannot be identified.

A limited vocabulary while writing, a lack of grammatical accuracy and language command and a lack of regular writing practice are some of the many factors contributing to an increased risk of developing writing anxiety. When students are anxious, researchers have found that they are more likely to make mistakes while writing in a foreign language. It is because students constantly worry about the accuracy and authenticity of their written production [9]. When a learner experiences a certain level of anxiety, it can be detrimental to the learning process [10,11]. Writing anxiety stands out from the other three language skills as complicated to understand [12]. It is inextricably linked to the values, philosophies, and perspectives an individual develops concerning the language they study and master. When learning a foreign language requires more motivation and effort than learning one's native language, the learner may experience anxiety or fear of not being able to attain the required acquisitions and failing to do so. It is because learning a foreign language requires more work than learning one's native language. This problem is frequently encountered while developing writing skills built upon various other abilities. Because the process of producing writing, which requires high levels of cognitive ability, involves emotional and cultural components. Learners who have difficulty with this process have a lower sense of self-confidence and construct psychological barriers because they believe their goals are more out of reach. Because of this particular circumstance, anxiety regarding writing in a foreign language develops.

## 2. Literature review

Learners of second or foreign languages (S/FL) face many challenges, including linguistic, rhetorical, strategic, and cultural hurdles, leading to feelings of unease, anguish, uncertainty, or worry [13]. These challenges can be broken down into four categories: Anxiety about writing in a foreign language is defined as a collection of feelings, attitudes, and actions that prevent a person from completing a writing assignment that the person is capable of doing [14]. There might be three categories of writing anxiety: physical, avoidance, somatic and cognitive [1]. Somatic anxiety is a physical reaction to anxious feelings, such as perspiration, sweating, or trembling. Cognitive anxiety is when a person has negative thoughts and perceptions about the writing process, whereas avoidance behaviour is when a person actively tries to avoid situations that require writing. The participants' writing performance was significantly improved as a result of the portfolio-based writing instruction compared to the control group's performance in the [15]; this study explored the impact of portfolio-based instruction on the anxiety and performance in writing of Iranian EFL students. The primary factors contributing to difficulties with academic writing are vocabulary, grammar, and a lack of writing resources [16]. Additional difficulties with spelling, appropriate vocabulary, the construction of verb tenses and plural forms, and appropriate punctuation are also issues.

Some different factors have been identified as possible causes of writing anxiety. Anxiety about writing was formerly thought to stem from a combination of linguistic and cognitive factors, such as students' inadequate development of vocabulary knowledge, language structure, and content [17], and a lack of writing experience [18]. Writers also exhibited several behavioral difficulties, including a lack of confidence in the target language (also known as negative writing self-efficacy), reluctance to write, fear of criticism, and evaluation anxiety [1,7,18]. The anxiety about writing varies from person to person based on factors like socio-economic issues and gender and age [19]. Anxiety about writing can also be caused by environmental factors like teachers, instructional methods, and classmates [20]. These factors include but are not limited to the need to avoid rigid methodologies of teaching, unfamiliar writing forms, themes that would be uninteresting, and insufficient feedback from teachers, which might be overtly negative. It is anticipated that individual factors, in conjunction with contextual factors and the learning environment (for example, the influence of family and parents, the impact of teachers), will combine to produce a spectrum of writing and foreign language anxiety types and levels [21].

Recently, researchers have begun conducting studies utilising a variety of approaches in order to investigate ways to lessen the anxiety associated with writing in a foreign language [22,23]. A series of experiments were conducted with Turkish EFL pre-service teachers discovering moderate and high anxiety levels, with somatic dimension being the most common symptom [24]. Those participants who reported significant anxiety primarily attributed it to product-oriented writing instruction and insufficient prior writing expertise. Similarly, an experiment conducted on EFL students found that while some participants did not experience anxiety, high and moderate anxiety were found in most participants [25]. The factors that contributed to their nervousness were analogous to those described in the section that came before this one. The researchers tested the efficacy of collaborative writing exercises in pre-service instructors to determine their effectiveness in writing anxiety [26]. They found that the intervention was successful. Researchers investigated the connection between the type of feedback prospective Turkish teachers got on their writing and the level of anxiety they experienced when writing [27]. Participants who received input from their peers reported significantly lower anxiety levels than those who received instructor comments. Further investigation revealed that the students' somatic (physical) and social anxiety levels were elevated, whereas their levels of cognitive anxiety were significantly lower than average [28]. Students feel anxious when writing in Turkish, with anxiety levels varying according to nationality, alphabet difference, and reading habits. The study group was made up primarily of Turkish students. Moreover, their self-developed writing anxiety scale was administered to the study group. It was discovered that students feel anxious when writing in Turkish. The findings of the current study may help EFL instructors assist students in overcoming their fear of writing by assisting them in coping with factors that increase their anxiety, such as the variety of their vocabulary, the accuracy of their grammar, and the content of their writing. The students may have a more successful learning process if they know the potential causes of their anxiety and if their instructors provide assistance in this area.

### 3. Objectives of the study

This research aims to assess the writing anxiety ESL teachers experience in writing classes as part of their pre-service preparation. Some participant-specific characteristics, such as gender and anxiety types, will be considered in this endeavour. Furthermore, the study aims to investigate which factors might have a role in the progression of writing issues among future instructors. Further expression of the interviewee's insights and perceptions regarding the causes of writing anxiety can be found in the interview responses. Finally, the present study is a continuation of a study already published before this publication. However, this study was conducted in a different geographical area with different research gaps and aims yet employing a similar theoretical framework and method. Later, the research will also conduct a comparative study in future to assess the differences between those distinctive geographical areas with a distinctive research gap. Hence, the future researcher would conduct the same study's theoretical framework and method in a different geographical area or academic setting.

### 4. Research questions

The purpose of this investigation is to provide explanations for the following questions.

1. How common is writing anxiety in English as a foreign language among future educators who get pre-service training?
2. Does a person's gender affect their nervousness about writing in a foreign language before they start teaching?
3. How do pre-service teachers perceive foreign language writing anxiety reasons?

### 5. Methodology

Mixed-method research was employed, with quantitative and qualitative data being gathered and analyzed sequentially. Two writing-anxiety questionnaires were utilised to collect quantitative data, and semi-structured interviews with study participants provided insight into the qualitative findings.

### 6. Instruments

The present study has utilised two research tools; a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. For the first research tool, several researchers have already used two reliable writing anxiety questionnaires for exploring research objectives. The first questionnaire SLWAI [1], possesses Cronbach .90, displaying considerable validity and reliability. The 5 Likert-scale questionnaire consists of 21 questions further into three categories; cognitive (questions 1, 3, 6, 8, 13, 16, 19, 20), somatic (questions 2, 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 18) and avoidance behaviour (questions 4, 9, 11, 15, 17, 21). This tool is suitable for investigating anxiety levels and categories per the current research's requirement.

The second research questionnaire SLWARI [2], has been used to explore learners' perceptions of writing anxiety reasons. SLWARI is suitable for the research perspective with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.91 with a 0.66 construct validity. The questionnaire consists of 31 questions related to reasons and feelings about writing anxiety broadly categorised into three thematic categories; writing teachers, writing course background and writing skill itself.

The second research tool was a semi-structured interview session for the sake of detailed information about participants' opinions of writing anxiety and its reasons. The participants shared their opinion about foreign language writing anxiety and how they feel about different aspects of their writing ability.

### 7. Interview questions

The participants were asked five planned questions and some additional questions according to the situation and context of the interview sessions.

1. How would you describe your writing skills?
2. Do you get nervous while writing in English?
3. What do you think of the instructor's approach to teaching writing?
4. How do you feel about course books in general?
5. What do you find to be the most challenging barrier to overcome when writing in English?

### 8. Participants

Seventy-six students (37 male and 39 female) from Education University (Lahore) were selected for the study. The research collected data from the Education University that offers this course for pre-service teachers. The study participants possessed 16–18 years of English language academic training in their previous study time. They were mainly between 21 and 24 and had a background in the English medium school system. The participants were selected through convenience sampling [29] who attended the same level of training.

## 9. Procedure

Pre-service teachers are trained within a three-semester educational training program, each semester comprising four months starting from January–April 2022 (semester 1), May–August 2022 (semester 2) and September–December 2022 (final semester plus practical). The current study was conducted during their second semester in the first week because, until then, the participants had already practised different writing skills in their first semester. The two questionnaires were conducted one by one at the same time, whereas the interview session was conducted after one week of the survey. The interview session was audio recorded, lasting 8–10 min for each participant. The researcher approached forty-five participants, and twenty (eleven male and nine female) agreed to participate in the interview (See Table 1).

## 10. Ethical consideration

As suggested, the researchers considered ethical issues. We told the people who participated in the study what it was all about and ensured they did not have to participate. We also told them that the data would only be used for research. We used codes (numbers) for direct quotes from participants so that they could remain anonymous as we looked at the data.

### Consent

The participants agreed and were told that their information would be kept private and that how well they did on any tasks would not affect their grades in this course. Those who volunteered to take part in the study filled out a consent form that said they were okay with having their answers published.

## 11. Analysis of survey data

The SLWAI results were evaluated, and a record was made of the overall score that each participant received on the questionnaire. The total score was then broken down into high, moderate, and low degrees of anxiety. The participants’ degrees of anxiety ranged from high and extreme to moderate and mild. In order to determine whether or not gender has a role in the degree of anxiety, the anxiety ratings of both male and female people were compared. In order to discover which of the three anxiety categories learners struggle with the most, an evaluation was conducted using several sorts of questions, including cognitive, somatic, and avoidance. The statistical analysis performed after commuting was conducted by SPSS version 23 to compare the three groups that pertain to gender. The findings of the SLWARI were evaluated descriptively, with the frequencies and percentages of anxiety-cause categories being displayed.

In the current study, QCA was derived from the second author’s PhD study, which was used for data coding [30]. The first researcher also used the mentioned data coding process in a previous study. It conducted analyses of the data from a communication point of view [31,32] by using QCA [33], which resulted in the refinement and validation of data analysis categories and patterns [33–36]. Directed QCA was used to interview text to assess communication and feedback procedures [37]. The research resulted in modifications to the directed QCA proposed by Ref. [33].

## 12. Sampling and data processing for the qualitative approach

By selecting “key informants,” researchers developed their general research technique [34]. It suggested conducting interviews with willing subjects using purposive sampling [38] and concentrating on transcriptions of interview data [33,34]. Based on the study’s aims and the essential concepts from the existing literature, the researchers developed an interview guide with free-form questions [35], which involved conducting interviews and recording the data from each session [39,40]. Forty-five students/participants previously involved in the quantitative study were recruited for this reason. Twenty participants, however, volunteered to be interviewed.

The transcripts of the interviews were designated as the unit of analysis. Participants’ educational identification, venue and communication type, and when and why it occurred were assessed as frequently as suggested [33,34]. Immersing data yielded research-related meaning [32–35]. Key analytic categories were established [32], sub-categories making the connection with literature theoretically [31]—objectively developed technical, behavioral, and classroom/meeting room concerns. The primary and sub-category coding standards were described [31]. Coding was planned by first identifying themes and categories by eliminating, including and excluding transcripts. Later, categories and sub-categories were applied to describe the classifications and objectives

**Table 1**  
Survey process and timeline.

Activity	Time
Basic information from and Consent letter	Day 1, First week, semester 1
SLWAI questionnaire	Day 2, First week, semester 1
SLWARI questionnaire	Day 3, First week, semester 1
Interview sessions	Day 2–5, Second week, semester 1

[36].

### 13. Findings

The study’s results reveal students’ anxiety levels: high, moderate, and low. The study also examines the difference in anxiety levels between male and female students and the three primary categories of anxiety (cognitive, somatic, and avoidance behaviour).

#### 13.1. Findings of research question 1

In order to answer the first study question, participants’ aggregate SLWAI scores were used to classify them into one of three anxiety levels. A score of 75 or higher indicated high anxiety, whereas scores above 80 and 95 indicated very severe anxiety. Anxiety levels were rated as low for those with a score of less than 57 and moderate for those between 57 and 7. Total scores were calculated based on all participants’ responses, which revealed the average level of anxiety across the sample as a whole. The distribution of participants across the three anxiety categories is shown in Table 2.

According to the SLWAI inventory descriptive analysis (Table 2), it is significant to observe that most participants suffer from high anxiety levels of 48.6%. Only 8.3% of the students seemed to face low anxiety levels, whereas 43.3% of respondents were moderately anxious. These findings support the responses of interview sessions where most participants expressed their anxiety at its peak while writing.

SLWAI questions served as the basis for the survey’s section divisions, which resulted in the questionnaire having three distinct parts (cognitive, somatic, avoidance, and behaviour). The term “cognitive anxiety” refers to a student’s apprehensive behaviour in reaction to a bad evaluation or criticism. On the other hand, somatic anxiety is characterized by fear and worry manifesting in the body as shaking or other physical symptoms. Students who shun writing prompts and activities that involve writing are said to be engaging in avoidance behaviour. Avoidance behaviour is a condition. The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out on the obtained data on anxiety. According to the results, cognitive anxiety was more prominent (see Table 4). The mean score for cognitive anxiety was ( $M = 21.92$ ), and the mean scores for somatic and avoidance behaviour were ( $M = 18.27$ ) and ( $M = 18.81$ ), respectively (see Table 3).

#### 13.2. Findings of RQ2

The second research question investigates whether gender makes a difference in the anxious feelings of learners while writing in a foreign language, and statistical analysis responded to this inquiry.

The data collected by the participants through SLWAI Inventory showed that there is no discrimination of anxious feelings among learners regarding foreign language writing ( $p = .892$ ). The *t*-test analysis was conducted on gender-specific questionnaire data in this regard, and there was no significant difference that may show gender as an essential variable to consider for writing anxiety (See Table 5).

#### 13.3. Findings of RQ3

The data collected through SLWARI) was analyzed to respond to research question 3. The SLWARI inventory was divided into three parts [25] based on the key sources of worry: student views of writing assignments and writing skills, teachers, and writing courses and books.

The questions on how students felt about their professors and instructors in their writing classes (items 2, 5, 7, 9, 18, 20, 25, and 26) indicated the important role that instructors play in writing classes (See Table 6). While 59.7% of respondents feel that instructors understand the material they are teaching ( $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ), just 30.6% perceive the opposite to be true. Only 26.4% of participants perceived that their questions were not being addressed ( $M = 2.47$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ), whereas 59.8% of persons perceived that their questions were handled ( $M = 2.47$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ). Concerns were voiced in response to the question on the feedback that instructors offer on their students’ writing since the results showed that 38.9% of respondents said that they are not given feedback on their errors by their teachers. In addition, 44.4% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the comments they received and how they were provided ( $M = 2.88$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ). Lessons being taught in the classroom are another factor that raises concerns regarding the methods of teachers. ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) Thirty-six per cent of participants believe that instructors move on to other subjects more often, making it more difficult to grasp the content ( $SD = 1.33$ ). More than half of the pupils believe that their professors make learning interesting and are actively involved in the classroom. The vast majority of participants praised professors for their use of examples to better students’

**Table 2**  
Descriptive analysis of participant’s anxiety levels.

Categories of Anxiety	f	%
High Anxiety	37	48.6
Average anxiety	33	43.4
Low anxiety	6	8.3
Sum	76	100.00

**Table 3**  
Descriptive results through One-way ANOVA analysis.

Types	N	Mean	SD	SE	95%CI	
					LB	UB
cognitive	76	21.92	7.88	.904	20.11	23.72
somatic	76	18.27	7.07	.811	16.66	19.89
avoidance	76	18.81	6.09	.699	17.42	20.20
Total	228	19.67	7.20	.477	18.73	20.61

**Table 4**  
One-way ANOVA analysis.

	SS	DF	MS	F	Sig.
Between groups	588.18	2	294.09	5.90	.003
Within groups	11198.14	225	49.77		
Total	11786.32	227			

**Table 5**  
Independent t-test scores of gender comparison.

Gender	N	Mean	St. Deviation	t	df	P
Female	39	20.72	7.22			
Male	37	20.46	7.45	.159	74	.892

**Table 6**  
Participant’s response analysis according to SLWARI (items 2, 5, 7, 9, 18, 20, 25, and 26).

Items	Agreement%	Disagreement%	Mean	SD
2. The teacher does not teach the subject well.	30.6	59.7	2.57	1.38
5. The teacher does not answer students’ questions.	26.4	59.8	2.47	1.36
7. The teacher does not give feedback to student writing.	38.9	44.4	2.88	1.37
9. The teacher does not encourage Students to write better.	31.9	56.9	2.60	1.54
18. The teachers pass on to the new subject very fast.	30.6	44.4	2.79	1.33
20. I get bored because the teacher is boring.	33.3	52.7	2.60	1.45
25. The teacher does not give enough examples.	29.2	58.4	2.54	1.36
26. The teacher does not direct students to write well.	29.1	55.5	2.63	1.25

writing and students’ overall comprehension of the material covered in class. According to the replies that students gave to the inventory items that asked about their attitudes toward instructors, most students are pleased with how their writing teachers carry out their responsibilities and put up their best effort in the classroom.

Students responded to the questions (items 1, 6, 8, 13, 30, 31) about writing classes and courses with a few ideas (See Table 7). Participants believed that 62.5% of their writing issues were due to their lack of experience in English writing courses. Participants did concur that the course books provided a lot of practical examples. On the contrary, thirty-eight students (52.8%) believe their textbooks are engaging. 29.2% of students find no interest in their writing subject books. Less time is given for 33.3% of participants to practice what they have learned through course book tasks ( $M = 2.67, SD = 1.46$ ). The majority of participants enjoy writing exercises after class to improve their performance. Following that, 66.4% of participants disagreed ( $M = 2.57, SD = 1.43$ ) that “irregularity in class attendance” may be a factor in failing. Overall, the course book does an excellent job of covering everything a writing class needs to know.

37.5% of participants who responded to the questions about writing abilities stated they could not write on any subject as they did

**Table 7**  
Participant’s response analysis according to SLWARI (items 1, 6, 8, 13, 30, and 31).

Items	Agreement%	Disagreement%	Mean	SD
1. I have difficulty writing because I did not take a writing course before.	27.8	62.5	2.29	1.36
6. The course book does not contain enough examples.	30.5	55.6	2.67	1.40
8. The course book is boring	29.2	52.8	2.75	1.44
13. There are not enough exercises in the course book.	33.3	31.9	2.67	1.46
30. The examples in the course books are not exploratory.	23.6	65.2	2.39	1.35
31. I am unsuccessful because I do not study regularly for writing courses.	30.6	66.4	2.57	1.43

not have much awareness of grammatical rules and knowledge (See Table 8). They still have thoughts but cannot combine them into whole phrases (M = 2.78, SD = 1.44). Finding a topic to write about is straightforward for 62.5% of participants when managing any writing activity. Thus, few participants find writing classes unpleasant, whereas 63.9% find them enjoyable. Another reason participants shared was trouble in writing (M = 2.40, SD = 1.33) due to a lack of practice and consistent writing habits. 54.2% of subjects are entirely clueless when asked to write an essay. Writing is considered to be a delicate skill by 47.2% of participants, and writers engage in practical writing activities (M = 3.08, SD = 1.39). Half the participants struggle to organise their thoughts. For instance, they cannot logically group thoughts together and connect them in their writing. 61.1% of individuals (M = 2.54, SD = 1.36) reported having trouble structuring their thoughts while writing. Participants also brought up the question of expression. It is challenging for 52.8% of participants to put thoughts together into words as they cannot deliver their ideas on paper, and many students question their creativity.

13.4. Analysis of interview responses

The information gathered from interview transcripts showed how students perceive their writing anxiety and what triggers it when they write in a foreign language. The participants acknowledged the lack of vocabulary and grammatical skills and trouble arranging the composition. When the learners are thinking and gathering their thoughts in their mother tongue, it is hard to interpret or translate them into a foreign language. Many students admitted that they had never written anything before entering college. The following quotes illustrate the correlation between participant interview responses and questionnaire results. Interviewees were coded as,

Teacher Student Participant = TSP, further one till 20 means number of students.

1. How would you describe your writing skills?

Perceptions of their writing skills varied when questioned about it. Although most student instructors claim to have intermediate writing skills, they still worry about making mistakes in their writing. Due to their lack of writing experience in high school, many participants experience anxiety when writing in English. *“I do not think I’m a bad writer, but I still make technical errors when writing” (TSP3).*

Another interviewee stated, *“Even though I’ve made it a goal of mine to improve as a writer and make fewer mistakes in my work, I still struggle when I have to put pen to paper.” (TSP4).*

2. Do you get nervous while writing in English?

One of the most critical issues that were brought up was that students were given fewer opportunities to write, and when required to write, the vast majority of them would try to pack as much information as possible into their writing. Most high school students felt they did not have adequate time or opportunities to practise writing during their required curriculum. Another issue connected to students not having enough experience writing was their tendency to cram for exams. *“When I have to write something, I am nervous and hesitant, and the majority of the time, I would rather just memorise the information.” (TSP11).*

*“When I have to write in English, I get anxious, and my palms start to sweat. Writing class is the only class that makes me feel this way.” (TSP5).*

3. What do you think of the instructor’s approach to teaching writing?

Table 8

Participant’s response analysis according to SLWARI items (3, 4, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29).

Items	Agreement%	Disagreement%	Mean	SD
3. When there is a topic, I do not know what to write about that topic	31.9	51.4	2.67	1.38
4. I cannot express myself in English because I lack grammar knowledge.	37.5	48.6	2.78	1.44
10. I have difficulty finding topics to write	29.2	62.5	2.47	1.44
11. I do not like writing classes.	25	63.9	2.31	1.39
12. I have difficulty in this course because I do not have a writing habit	65.3	22.2	2.40	1.33
14. I do not know how to begin writing.	55.6	32.0	2.60	1.44
15. Writing is a skill; only skilled people can write good pieces	47.2	52.8	3.08	1.48
16. I cannot organise my ideas to write.	54.2	30.6	2.63	1.40
17. I cannot improve my English because I do not read enough.	30.6	43	2.63	1.40
19. I cannot organise what I want to write.	50.0	37.5	2.71	1.49
21. I cannot combine ideas with each other when I write.	61.1	26.4	2.54	1.36
22. I cannot express what I think.	52.8	33.3	2.67	1.36
23. I have difficulty in writing because I am used to taking tests	30.5	54.2	2.82	1.33
24. I organise my ideas in English while writing; therefore, I cannot express them in English.	33.3	55.6	2.69	1.49
27. I cannot write because I lack the vocabulary	33.3	52.7	2.82	1.24
28. I do not like writing	31.9	59.8	2.54	1.43
29. I cannot generate ideas, so I am not creative.	33.4	57	2.65	1.49

When asked about their instructors and methods, the students had nothing but positive things to say. Teachers did a good job at explaining the rules of writing and providing numerous examples, although students who did not speak English as a first language often had trouble following along. Even though the teacher made an effort to make the class engaging and included many examples. At the same time, teaching, there were occasions when teachers (in the role of learners) felt bored by the various grammatical rules. *“There are times when I have trouble understanding what our teacher is trying to say, even though she has made great attempts to explain the fundamentals of writing and has provided many examples to illustrate her points.”* (TSP11).

“There are so many grammar rules that there are times when I find myself getting bored, but our teacher makes an effort to keep the course entertaining and uses numerous examples when teaching.” (TSP13).

On the other hand, they stated that most teachers attempted to balance giving one lesson and moving on to the next. They made sure that all of the students were on the same page and grasped the material that was being presented. Participants, on average, had positive attitudes toward the approach and methods of their teachers. They felt their lecturers provided sufficient examples and exercises during lessons, facilitating learning.

#### 4. How do you feel about course books in general?

The participants gave their opinions on how accurately books and courses are written. They believe that course books provide activities and examples that are highly helpful to the student. Concerns were voiced by several individuals over intricate grammar rules, which are not only challenging to comprehend but also ineffective in spoken communication. While acting in the role of students, some instructors expressed their opinion that textbooks can be more fun. They appeared hopeful about the substance of the course book practice activities; nonetheless, there are occasions when grammatical rules are challenging to understand. *“There is some material in the books that is extremely lengthy and of relatively low interest, which may at times lead to our feeling frustrated.”* (TSP8) and *“When I have to complete lengthy exercises for my grammar practice, I find that I become bored.”* (TSP10).

#### 5. What do you find to be the most challenging barrier to overcome when writing in English?

Some students stated that when the instructor assigns them any topic to write about, they will write about anything. They come up with many thoughts and points but have trouble arranging them. They worry that they lack the skill to write coherently. Because of their limited vocabulary, some people also experience anxiety if asked to write in English. Paralysis by analysis can be brought on by the sheer number of words one must learn. Even though they want to write, they cannot seem to get anything down on paper. Students sometimes second-guess the grammatical accuracy of their papers after turning them in.

Furthermore, most of them see good grammar as a flaw. Many educators (as students) can collect ideas but cannot adequately express them in writing because of a lack of grasp of grammatical intricacies. Examination anxiety is also commonly reported. Individuals felt less pressure to do well during classroom activities than formal assessments. They worry that they will be unable to do well on tests or organise their ideas well on paper because of their stress. Teachers (in the role of students) have reported that peer pressure and the fear of being evaluated are significant motivating factors in their actions. Individuals who received negative evaluations or comments from their instructors also reported experiencing anxiety and worry. They fear the scorn of their classmates if they turn in a poorly written paper. They worry that their performance will be unfavorably appraised.

## 14. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to look into how gender plays a role in the varying degrees of writing anxiety felt by pupils. Learner-perceived causes of writing anxiety were also uncovered, along with the most common types of anxiety experienced by participants (cognitive, physical, and avoidant behaviour).

### 14.1. Discussion on findings of research question 1

The first study question focused on identifying the various levels of anxiety that participants experienced, exceptionally high, average, and low levels. The study’s results revealed that most student-teacher participants had high and typical levels of anxiousness. According to research on EFL Egyptian tertiary students, writing was viewed as unpleasant and unfulfilling by students who experienced severe writing anxiety levels [41]. Students with high levels of writing anxiety are more likely to avoid writing surroundings, feel unmotivated when writing, see writing tasks negatively, turn in low-quality work, misjudge the quality of their writing, and have negative self-perceptions about their writing. A survey of 298 Iranian EFL students [42–44] found that they experience high writing anxiety levels [45]. Turkish teacher applicants did well on the sub-dimensions of spelling and punctuation standards compliance and writing abilities.

Furthermore, they discovered that writers tend to have a superficial understanding of writing’s underlying characteristics as a literary form and a means of communication. The anxiety inventory broke down symptoms into three main groups: mental, bodily, and avoidance. Researchers surveyed 120 Iranian EFL students and found that cognitive anxiety was more prevalent than somatic and avoidance behaviors [46,47]. It also found that students’ anxious feelings are significantly impacted by their levels of cognitive anxiety [48].



#### 14.2. Discussion on findings of research question 2

The second research question about the influence of gender in determining the anxiety level of students exhibited no significant effect, indicating that the anxiety level of students is unrelated to whether they are male or female. A study revealed no significant difference between the Turkish learners' level of writing anxiety and gender [49]. It was concluded that the gender variable does not significantly influence writing anxiety [50]. On the other hand, it was discovered that male participants had higher levels of prejudices and writing anxiety than female participants [45]. The study also discovered that male participants had a higher level of writing anxiety. It was also found that gender variables were not significant among the writing anxiety levels of EFL learners [50,51]. It was revealed that no gender influenced students' writing apprehension level in favour of either group [52,53]. However, a study identified gender effects indicating considerably more significant general foreign language anxiety and writing anxiety among females [46]. However, the present study adds to research evidence where gender showed no significant difference among pre-service teacher students' foreign language writing anxiety.

#### 14.3. Discussion on findings of research question 3

When trying to understand why students are so worried about their writing abilities, the third research question is the most crucial one to ask. In the interviews that followed the questionnaire, no participants complained about the stressful situations that had resulted from teachers or how they had been discouraged from pursuing their own growth. According to the findings, familiar sources of nervousness include doubt about one's abilities, difficulties with the target language or grammar, a lack of preparation, difficulties maintaining order, and aversion to criticism. Consequently, the current worry stems from many different origins. There were also no clear signs of student discontentment in the responses to the questions about textbook authorship. Students' writing worries seemed more directly connected to how well they could write. Most students cannot adequately express themselves in writing or speak fluently. Writing anxiety is widespread among students because they lack command over grammar and mechanics. The inability to express oneself well in written form in a foreign language is a major source of stress for students of that language.

### 15. Conclusion

According to quantitative and qualitative studies, most students eventually become teachers exhibiting high or moderate anxiety levels. It was discovered that there was no correlation between the gender of the learner and their level of writing anxiety. In addition, many additional elements came into play, such as difficulties with language, the worry of receiving unfavourable criticism, a lack of self-confidence, and terrible experiences from the past. In contrast to the results of many other studies, the participants in this one did not place the responsibility for their anxious sentiments on the teaching methods or feedback preferences of their instructors. Over half of the participants in the classroom feel that their teachers are engaging and interesting. There was widespread praise for the instructors' use of examples to illustrate key points and guide students toward sustained excellence in writing. The results of the inventory questions about students' attitudes toward their instructors make it abundantly evident that most students are pleased with how their instructors perform their duties and put forth their utmost effort to instruct in writing classes. Aside from that, teachers could try to push students to write by bringing up themes that are either one that the students are already familiar with or ones that are timely and fascinating to discuss in class [54].

The vast majority of students had difficulties communicating appropriately. Most students blame their lack of confidence in their writing on their perceived lack of grammatical correctness. Students' fears about making mistakes in their writing often stemmed from their limited command over lexical and grammatical choices [55]. The other themes, like language barriers like a lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, insufficient prior writing experiences, fear of peers' disapproval [56], difficulty organising and generating ideas, a lack of self-confidence [57], a lack of topical knowledge or an uninteresting topic [24], and time constraints, back up the earlier research. Given the consensus that L2 writing anxiety is under-researched, this work can increase awareness of the numerous facets of L2 writing anxiety and generate much future research on the topic from diverse perspectives.

### 16. Limitations of the study

Nonetheless, the study may not be able to yield generalisable results due to its numerous limitations, limited sample size, and non-native pre-service English teacher participants. In addition, the academic and demographic background of the participants, such as their public or private schooling background. It is proposed to conduct such anxiety studies with more participants for future research to acquire more meaningful results.

### 17. Future implications

There may be far-reaching consequences for language and teacher education programmes in light of the study's findings. Teachers of English as a foreign language, no matter how seasoned, should be mindful that students' anxiousness can get in the way of their writing (learners in the present case). Teachers should be aware of this drawback before blaming students' lack of writing on a lack of enthusiasm, inability, or boredom with the course. It is possible that students who feel anxious in a foreign language class could benefit from participating in some exercises designed to alleviate that worry. Teachers can be encouraged to encourage their students to write and respond to their written work through programmes and seminars that focus on how to set up the classroom so that students do not

comment on or laugh at one another's errors and how to select the most effective error correction strategy.

Writing is a skill that may be fostered in the classroom by providing students with interesting and timely writing assignments and utilising the material of which the students are already aware [58,59]. Peer feedback, ungraded writing assignments (such as keeping a topical diary), and introducing vocabulary-expansion tools are just a few ideas that could assist students in overcoming this issue. Though the thought of sitting down to write an essay can make some people nervous, these kinds of pre-writing chats can be quite helpful in providing a solid foundation upon which to build. The results necessitate investigating the time commitment and content of writing assignments given to language students. Let us assume that improving reading and writing is one of the aims. Multiple studies have shown that those who use product-based pedagogies can be a source of concern for their students [5,11]. Therefore, instruction must start early, perhaps as early as elementary or high school. When using a process-oriented approach, it is essential [60]. More studies on reducing writing-related stress should be conducted as soon as possible.

#### Author contribution statement

Ushba Rasool: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Wrote the paper.

Muhammad Zammad Aslam: Analyzed and interpreted the data.

Rabia Mahmood: Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data.

Sami Hussein Hakeem Barzani: Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data.

Jiancheng Qian: Analyzed and interpreted the data; Wrote the paper.

#### Funding statement

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

#### Data availability statement

Data will be made available on request.

#### Declaration of interest's statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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