

## Factors Leading to Writing Anxiety in EFL Classes

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**Abstract:** This study investigated the writing anxiety of second language learners and analyzed the positive and negative implications of this concern. The research examined anxiety, foreign language anxiety, and the primary functions of writing anxiety. To view this topic from the students' perspective, 94 secondary and high school students from Stirling Schools in Iraq and university students from TISHK International University completed a questionnaire. According to the survey findings, writing anxiety has beneficial and harmful effects on children. The children were not adversely affected by the feedback of their peers and educators, which was an unexpected finding. Another remarkable result is that many pupils had writing anxiety due to inadequate grammar and vocabulary. The most striking and gratifying outcome is that students believe they are more successful when writing on themes they enjoy and are familiar with. In this way, their writing anxiety decreases, and they can produce more productive work.

**Keywords:** Foreign Language Anxiety, Language Anxiety, Writing Anxiety, Writing Anxiety Factors

### 1. Introduction

The English language originated many years ago to become a common language as a result of globalization. Since the beginning of international exchanges, foreign language instruction has been fundamental. Learning a foreign language can help a person better understand the world (Celik & Yildiz, 2019). The popularity of the English language is increasing day by day, and people learn English first to find a career and to be more successful in life (Andayani, 2022), and writing plays a crucial role in the acquisition of a foreign language (Kassem, 2017). Students require career preparation that is why learners who can manage their own learning will be more prepared and more successful in life (Yildiz & Yucedal, 2020).

Receptive skills, such as reading and listening, are crucial for any task requiring comprehension. The ability to read is a precursor to the ability to write, and the ability to listen is a precursor to the ability to talk; both are considered productive talents (Yildiz, 2020). English writing have become essential for intercultural communication in the globalized world. Feeling at ease for all individuals, as well as writing an article or beginning a language course, has become the focus of many instructors' curricula and has been incorporated into the curriculum (Lin & Ho 2009). Knowing a language entail not just mastery of its

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grammar principles but also proficiency in its speaking, writing, and listening abilities (Ilhan & Tutkun, 2020). The primary objective of language instruction is to bring students to a specified proficiency level in the target language. As stated in the preceding statement, these talents are categorized into four primary categories: writing, reading, speaking, and listening. The skills described are grouped into two categories: perceptive, reading and listening, and creative, speaking and writing.

According to the findings of the foreign language skills study, teaching reading and writing skills in online/offline foreign language teaching is relatively more efficient, but teaching listening and speaking skills is generally inefficient since not being in close eye contact with the student during speaking activity and not being able to give instant feedback decreases participation and evaluation problems (Celik et al., 2022). Furthermore, writing is the last and hardest linguistic skill to learn, so it is taught last to the learners (Yildiz, 2019). Writing is one of these skills that requires productivity and time, and it is also not an effortless task (Choi, 2013). It can be stated that all EFL students must improve and perfect their writing skills, as this is a life-saving skill that influences all other subjects (Karlina & Pancoro, 2018).

## **2. What is Anxiety?**

Anxiety is the state of feeling fearful and restless as a result of fear. In the subsequent process, your body perspires, you become agitated and anxious, and your heart rate accelerates. The normal stress response is anxiety. A person may have anxiety in different aspects of life, such as before a job interview or an exam for which he is unprepared. Anxiety can have a positive effect in such circumstances, allowing you to focus on your work. However, it can have detrimental effects on individuals who cannot regulate their anxiety and are afflicted with the condition (National Library of Medicine, n.d.).

### **2.1 What are the Types of Anxiety Disorders?**

#### **1. Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)**

People in this group are uncomfortable with the mundane things in life, such as money, family, future concerns, work, and health. But their anxiety is too great to be taken lightly, and they live with it for almost six months of the year.

#### **2. Panic Disorder**

People with panic disorder have panic attacks. These are periods of intense fear, and these attacks happen suddenly in people and can last for a few minutes. Panic disorder is generally considered a mental disorder among the general public and is a disorder that affects 5 percent of the population. In addition, in some people, it comes from genetics and reduces the quality of life (Roy-Byrne, 2006).

#### **3. Phobias**

People in this group are extremely afraid of things that would not typically even pose a danger to others. These fears can be situations such as touching animals, traveling by plane, or being in crowded environments (National Library of Medicine, n.d.).

In another study, Pappamihel (2002) examined anxiety in two groups as state and trait. State anxiety has been reported as a result of people being forced into certain situations. For example, a person anxious to speak in front of crowded groups is forced into this situation. On the other hand, trait anxiety stated that it is a situation that arises entirely from oneself, regardless of others.

Cheng (2002), who has conducted extensive research on this topic, analyzed anxiety in three distinct groups: Cognitive Anxiety, Somatic Anxiety, and Avoidance Behavior. Cognitive Anxiety is anxiety that arises from other people's comments, Somatic Anxiety is anxiety that occurs from psychological reasons, such as fear and stress, and the third is a situation in which anxiety is experienced.

## **2.2 Foreign Language Anxiety**

Language anxiety is a problem of tension and anxiety experienced by students learning foreign languages (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Almost half of the foreign language learners are anxious about learning a foreign language (Worde, 1998). In recent years, anxiety associated with learning a foreign language or a second language has become a primary consideration and researchers have presented varying perspectives on this topic for a long time (Tran, 2012). In addition, it has been reported in some studies that students with foreign language anxiety will see learning as a troublesome and boring activity (Gregersen, 2005). In their study, Horwitz et al. (1986) noted that FLA (foreign language anxiety) is “a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process” (p. 128) It has been proven that foreign language anxiety can severely impact school life and academic achievement (Chen & Chang, 2004).

## **2.3 The Effects of Foreign Language Anxiety on Language Learning**

According to studies, language anxiety has many negative and positive effects on learning. Foreign Language Learning Anxiety is a complex condition that affects students' psychology, feelings, and self-confidence (Clément,1980). Although language learning anxiety is viewed as a reasonable force that pushes students, many academics and authors regard it as an impediment to students' progress (Aida,1994). In a study, it was observed that pupils with foreign language anxiety experience certain learning difficulties. These include pupils who attempt to compose an essay utilize fewer words than typical and do not adequately comprehend their lecturers' arguments (Casado & Dershiwsky, 2004). Similarly, Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) stated that a student's learning performance would be significantly affected by learning anxiety. Horwitz et al. (2010) classified the effects of Foreign Language Anxiety into many categories. First, academic insufficiency will result from students' excessive levels of language learning anxiety. Secondly, students with high foreign language learning anxiety do not give importance to the lessons as much as they should and miss them. Those with high learning anxiety miss more classes compared to others. Those with high learning anxiety miss more classes compared to others (Bailey,1983). Another result is that students with foreign language anxiety are more passive than others and have less contact with other people (Horwits et al., 2010). In a different study, Krashen and Terrell (1983) found that language learning anxiety functions as a filter that rejects incoming information. As a result, students with language learning anxiety experience reluctance, slow learning, sweating, excitement, or worry.

## 2.4 Writing Anxiety

Students' reluctance to enroll in writing classes is influenced by the curriculum's and teachers' high expectations for them. In addition, writing anxiety is caused by job applications and writing assignments in English classes (Cheng, 2004).

There is a correlation between language anxiety and foreign language writing performance (Kara, 2011). Success in writing depends on a person's capacity to communicate well, translate her thoughts to paper in harmony, have self-confidence, and derive enjoyment and pleasure from L2, although many students struggle in this area (Baştürkmen & Lewis, 2002; Kara & Abdulrahman, 2022).

Producing an academic paper necessitates strong cognitive abilities, as it requires the organization of ideas, a high level of mental processing, and the use of correct grammar. Since writing is a productive endeavor, students face a number of obstacles throughout the writing process (Erkan & Saban, 2011). In another study, it was emphasized that learners' inadequacy in writing skill mainly stems from anxiety, which has long been recognized as a barrier in the second language learning context for teachers and students (Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2015).

While writing is about knowledge, it is also an emotional act in which people think and feel. This is true of all forms of discourse: thoughts are written first, but it is emotions that give the writing significance. It is challenging to write without conveying emotions (Brand, 1987). Daly (1978) provided another explanation for why some students were reluctant to write because their writing would be evaluated and judged by educators. In addition to the fear of checking the written works, Sawyer et al. (1992) explained the reasons that cause the anxiety of writing in a foreign language for three different reasons, the first of which is the lack of self-confidence of the students, the second is their academic inadequacy, and the last is the lack of motivation.

## 2.5 The Impacts of Writing Anxiety

Writing demands greater productivity than other abilities and plays an essential part in the acquisition of foreign languages (Kassem, 2017). Individuals with a high level of writing anxiety avoid writing tasks (Cheng, 2002), and those with little writing anxiety get more academic accomplishment than those with more significant writing anxiety (Hassan, 2001). For this reason, writing anxiety is a problem that EFL students often face and is a factor that significantly affects writing. Writing is difficult for various reasons, including gathering the essential information, utilizing the appropriate resources, generating it according to the standards, and adhering to the norms of spelling. In addition, the problem becomes more complex when a second foreign language and a second language are involved. As a result, pupils are unable to produce items with the appropriate level of efficiency (Ekmekçi, 2018).

Karlina and Pancoro (2018) posed the topic of whether producing unsuccessful compositions is the outcome or the source of writing anxiety and argued that writing anxiety has two effects on language acquisition in general. Initially, when students experience worry, it will increase their learning and be advantageous, thereby keeping them prepared. Its negative impacts, on the other hand, diminish pupils' levels of education, and students are likely to experience anxiety since productive writing skills are necessary.

## 2.6 The Reason for Writing Anxiety Among Students

Students with difficulty speaking and writing in their mother tongue experience more significant language anxiety than those who successfully use their mother tongue (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999). Writing anxiety varies not just by the pupils' educational level but also by their gender identity. Males endure more significant writing anxiety than females and create inferior writing as a result (Jebreil et al., 2015). Compared to other talents, writing is not an easy task for pupils; it is a process that requires time and practice. In a research, Lin and Ho (2009) stated the following reasons,

### 1. Time Limitation

According to the results of the survey administered to three students, the following was determined: First student, writing anxiety happens in a short time, especially during tests, and I cannot focus one hundred percent on the subject. The second student stated that I am under a great deal of stress since, while writing, I focus on time rather than the issue. The last student stressed that my fear of deadlines decreases the quality of my work and even the number of words I will write. To comprehend how time restrictions, affect students, we might examine Elif and Yayli's studies (2019). According to this study, foreign language learners experience greater writing anxiety during timed tests compared to regular classes.

### 2. The evaluation Criteria of Educators

Educators play a major role in students' interest in writing and their success in this field (Palmquist and Young, 1992). In situations devoid of all psychological and negative issues, it is a teacher's principal duty to instruct children to write well (Lin & Ho, 2009). According to the thoughts of three students surveyed, the negative feedback they received from their teachers was a source of their writing anxiety. The first student mentioned that he places a high value on his educators' opinions and fears that they would provide unfavorable evaluations of his work. The second student expressed concern that every part of his work would be evaluated and that his teacher would assign bad grades. The final student, on the other hand, admits that when he produces an article, he is glad to receive positive comments from his teacher, but he fears receiving lousy feedback. On the other hand, Moos and Moos (1978) stated that, as a result of the competitive environment, classroom students are very effective at learning the rules, receiving support from the teacher, and attending class. They also had reduced absenteeism and gained a better education.

Onwuegbuzie et al. (1999) presented a succinct summary of this issue as follows: educators must provide excellent feedback, positive support, and, most importantly, empathy to their students at all phases of education, but they must continuously improve their teaching skills to do so.

### 3. Peer Competition

Competition among students is a factor that affects their self-confidence (Zimmerman,1995). According to the responses of the three researched students, the primary cause of concern over writing lessons is competition among peers. In addition to these, they contain some quite fascinating responses. One of them mentioned that, in the English class, there are students from English-

speaking countries whose language abilities are thus superior to ours. It causes us to retreat and maintain silence.

#### 4. Writing Topics

According to the responses of the students, pupils prefer to write about things they enjoy and have prior expertise with. They stated that they disliked having rules imposed upon them by others.

#### 5. Writing Format

The students noted that this subject is more straightforward than the others but that it requires more time to become accustomed to writing in the proper structure.

In addition to the previously mentioned challenges, teachers' reluctance to assist pupils and improper teaching methods may also contribute to students' language anxiety (Worde, 1998).

### 2.7 Methods of Overcoming Writing Anxiety

According to research, there are four fundamental ways to alleviate this anxiety: Working on the assigned subjects appropriately and frequently, seeing events from a positive perspective, finding means to unwind when necessary, and locating a peer as a final step (Marwan, 2016). Numerous studies have been conducted to overcome anxiety. When examining several studies, we can list the following in order: admitting all mistakes and making mistakes while writing (Bruning & Horn, 2000), learning writing techniques and presenting the work in a specific format (Horwitz & Horwitz, 1986), taking positive action in the face of anxiety and not giving in to it (Richards et al., 2002), pre-studying the article to be presented, preparing a plan and revealing it in a framework (Condon & Kelly-Riley, 2004), taking a break during writing whenever anxiety is experienced and then continue when calm (Jun Zhang, 2001), not to submit the work to be written all at once, but rather gradually and in stages (Kassem, 2017), students must have the appropriate knowledge about the topic they are writing about in order to achieve confidence while writing (Kurt & Atay, 2007), observing pupils with different forms of writing distress (Horwitz & Horwitz, 1986), meeting with the students and determining the evaluation criteria (Richards et al., 2002), recognizing student difficulties and address them appropriately (Kassem, 2017) and finally learners finish their activities and homework in order to move on. All of these things will give students a chance to interact with the course material (Daskan & Yildiz, 2020).

### 3. Methodology

In this study, a Google Form questionnaire with six questions was designed to determine the impact of writing anxiety on students and their perspectives on the topic. A total of 94 students participated in the questionnaire, 42 females and 52 males from secondary school, high school, and university. The following are the questions and details of the survey.

### 3.1 Gender percentage of participants

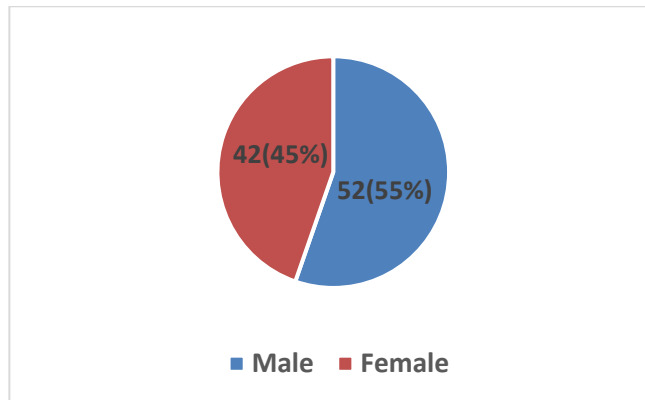


Figure 1.

As seen in figure 1. above, boys participated in the survey slightly more than girls. A total of 94 students participated, 52 (55%) boys and 42 (45%) girls.

### 3.2 Education Level of Participants

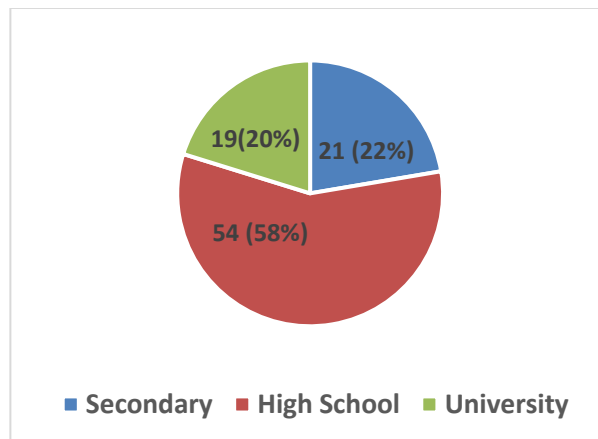


Figure 2.

The survey was implemented among secondary school, high school, and university students at three different education levels. A total of 94 students participated, including 21(22%) students from secondary school, 54 (58%) students from high school, and 19 (20%) students from the university.

## 4. Findings

Survey Statements to Analyze (the numbers in the tables indicate the number of students)



Table 1: Survey statements

Survey Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I am afraid of my teacher's comments when I write in English.	9	31	35	19
2. When writing in English, I worry about time limitations.	15	36	34	9
3. When writing in English, I worry about my friends' comments	17	11	50	16
4. When writing in English, I worry about my grammar and vocabulary	21	40	26	7
5. My background is not enough to write about any topic.	7	20	47	20
6. I will be more successful writing if I write about a topic I know.	49	38	3	4

The questions in Table 1. above were designed to study and reveal the causes of students' general writing anxiety. In the first question, it was questioned if the students were affected by their teachers' responses to a paper they had prepared. 40% of the pupils responded affirmatively. It implies that educators should exercise caution when evaluating any work. Surprisingly, sixty percent of the students expressed disagreement. They stated that the teacher's critiques have no negative effect on us.

In the second question, students' writing anxiety due to time constraints was questioned. When we examine the results, fifty percent of the students responded that limiting time spent at home causes stress. However, an equal proportion of the remaining 50% responded that the time limitation is not an issue for us.

Students were asked in the third question whether they were affected by the remarks of their peers. Just 28 pupils responded affirmatively. The remaining 66 pupils reported being unaffected by their peers' comments.

It was asked in the fourth question whether the students' lack of grammar and vocabulary would cause them to experience anxiety when writing. Approximately 60 percent of respondents said yes. This indicates that kids feel inadequate in grammar and vocabulary, which drives them to worry about writing. The remaining forty percent of respondents responded that they do not experience this issue.

Students were questioned in our fifth question if they had writing anxiety due to insufficient language training in the past. Analyzing the responses reveals that the kids do not have this difficulty. 27 of 94 students responded affirmatively to this question.

In our final inquiry, we asked students if they could write better when given a general and appealing topic. Almost all students responded affirmatively to this question. If students write about things they enjoy, their writing anxiety will reduce, and they will achieve more success.



## 5. Conclusion

A significant barrier to linguistic professionalization is writing and foreign language anxiety. In this study, we investigated how these worries affected writing. According to studies and surveys of students at various educational levels, writing anxiety has been found to have both beneficial and negative effects on pupils. Some of the positive results have been demonstrated to help pupils improve academically and maintain continual alertness. In particular, the negative consequences included making the pupils anxious, slowing the writing process, and preventing the creation of high-caliber work. One of the survey's unexpected findings is that kids are not bothered by their professors' and peers' criticism. However, there is one point that stands out: students with grammatical and vocabulary inadequacies experience writing anxiety, whereas students feel better when they write about subjects that they are familiar with and find interesting, and as a result, writing anxiety is reduced to a minimum.

In conclusion, when expressed in percentage terms, writing anxiety negatively impacts language learning more than a positive influence.

We did not include primary school students in the survey. It would be beneficial to include primary school students in future studies and to get their opinions. Finally, more efficient results will be obtained when these studies are carried out by considering two different classes in classroom environments.

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