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The Levels, Types, and Causes of Writing Anxiety among Pre-Service English Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the levels of writing anxiety among pre-service English teachers in University of Jember in 2024, focusing on three dimensions, namely, cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behaviour anxiety. The research also explores the underlying causes of writing anxiety in this group. Applying a descriptive research method, the research sampled 40 pre-service English teachers enrolled in an Introduction to Paragraph Writing class. Research data were collected through the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) developed by Cheng (2004) and follow-up interviews. Descriptive analysis of the data revealed that 53% of the pre-service teachers experienced writing anxiety, and the cognitive anxiety was the most prevalent form of anxiety in this group, with a mean score of 23.9, followed by somatic anxiety and avoidance behavior anxiety with mean scores of 21.76 and 20.82 respectively. Interview results indicated that key factors contributing to writing anxiety included insufficient writing practice, language difficulties, and a lack of writing technique.

Keywords: writing anxiety; cognitive anxiety; somatic anxiety; avoidance behavior anxiety; pre-service English teachers

INTRODUCTION

Writing skills are a crucial component of language learning, especially for pre-service English teachers. The ability to write is not only related to mastery of language structures but also to critical and creative thinking in organizing ideas (Algrenita & Listyani, 2020). However, writing in a foreign language often presents significant challenges, particularly for students with limited experience. One of the main challenges faced by pre-service English teachers is writing anxiety, a phenomenon that can impact academic performance and self-confidence in writing (Cahyani et al., 2023).

Research on writing anxiety in second language (L2) learning has been widely conducted, but much of it has focused on general writing contexts. Writing anxiety among pre-service language teachers, particularly pre-service English teachers, requires special attention because these teacher candidates are not only expected to have good a writing skill but also to be able to teach this skill to their future students (Kusumaningputri et al., 2018). Therefore, understanding the levels of writing anxiety and the factors influencing this anxiety is crucial, especially in the context of teacher education (Daar, 2020).

This study was conducted at Universitas Negeri Jember, at Teacher Training and Education Faculty (FKIP), English Education study program. The study focused on the students enrolled in the Introduction to Paragraph Writing course, a foundational subject in writing skill development. In this context, writing anxiety is highly relevant, given that paragraph writing is the first step toward mastering more complex writing skills. Based on initial observations, a significant number of students experienced writing anxiety. However, there has not been any specific research conducted to investigate this phenomenon at Universitas Negeri Jember.

This research aims to identify the levels of writing anxiety among pre-service English teachers and to describe the dimensions of anxiety, namely cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior anxiety. A descriptive research method was employed, involving 40 students from the Introduction to Paragraph Writing class. The primary instrument used was the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) developed by Cheng (2004), along with follow-up interviews to explore the underlying causes of writing anxiety.

The descriptive analysis revealed that 53% of the students experienced writing anxiety, with cognitive anxiety being the most prevalent dimension. Cognitive anxiety relates to concerns about one's ability to think and organize ideas when writing. In addition, somatic anxiety and avoidance behavior anxiety were also present among the pre-service teachers. Somatic anxiety involves physical symptoms such as tension and nervousness, while avoidance behavior anxiety is reflected in the tendency to avoid writing tasks (Arisman, 2023).

Follow-up interviews uncovered several key factors contributing to writing anxiety, including insufficient writing practice, language difficulties, and a lack of understanding of effective writing techniques (Fifteenth et al., 2022; Ganesha, 2022). These factors suggest that writing anxiety is not solely caused by limitations in language skills but also by inadequate pedagogical support in writing instruction (Sa'adah, 2020).

The findings of this study have important implications for curriculum development and the teaching of writing skills at the higher education level, particularly in teacher education programs. Given the importance of writing in the teaching profession, educational institutions should consider strategies to reduce writing anxiety, such as increasing writing practice with a process-oriented approach, providing constructive feedback, and offering more intensive support for students who struggle with writing. Additionally, efforts should be made to enhance students' motivation and confidence in writing through a more inclusive and participatory approach to writing instruction.

This study also highlights the importance of understanding writing anxiety from a multidimensional perspective, encompassing cognitive, somatic, and behavioral aspects. By recognizing these different dimensions, educators can design more targeted and effective interventions to help students overcome writing anxiety, enabling them to become more confident and competent writers.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive research design to investigate the levels of writing anxiety among pre-service English teachers at Universitas Negeri Jember, focusing on three dimensions of anxiety: cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior anxiety. Additionally, the study explored the underlying factors contributing to writing anxiety within this group of students.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 40 pre-service English teachers enrolled in the *Introduction to Paragraph Writing* course during the 2024 academic year at Universitas Negeri Jember. These students were selected through purposive sampling, as they represented the target population who were expected to develop foundational writing skills and were at risk of experiencing writing anxiety in this learning phase.

Instruments

To assess writing anxiety, the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) developed by Cheng (2004) was used as the primary data collection tool. The SLWAI is a well-established, validated instrument designed to measure writing anxiety in three dimensions: cognitive anxiety (worry and fear related to writing tasks), somatic anxiety (physical symptoms such as nervousness or tension), and avoidance behavior (tendency to avoid writing tasks). The SLWAI consisted of 22 items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

In addition to the SLWAI, follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of participants to gather qualitative data on the specific factors contributing to their writing anxiety. These interviews aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the causes behind the anxiety reported in the inventory and to explore students' perceptions of their writing difficulties and experiences.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was divided into two phases:

Phase 1: Survey Administration

The SLWAI was administered to the 40 participants during a scheduled class session. Before completing the questionnaire, students were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would be kept confidential. The survey took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

Phase 2: Follow-up Interviews

Following the survey, 10 participants who reported experiencing high levels of writing anxiety were selected for follow-up interviews. These interviews were conducted individually and lasted about 15-20 minutes each. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants, and the questions focused on their writing experiences, challenges in writing, and any specific factors they believed contributed to their anxiety.

Data Analysis

The data from the SLWAI were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and percentages, to determine the overall levels of writing anxiety and the prevalence of each anxiety dimension (cognitive, somatic, and avoidance behavior). The mean scores for each dimension were calculated and compared to identify which form of anxiety was the most dominant among the participants.

For the qualitative data from the interviews, thematic analysis was used to identify common themes related to the causes of writing anxiety. The recorded interviews were transcribed and coded to categorize the factors mentioned by the students, such as lack of writing practice, language barriers, or insufficient understanding of writing techniques. These qualitative findings were then triangulated with the survey results to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to writing anxiety.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity of the data, the SLWAI was used as a reliable instrument, having been widely employed in L2 writing anxiety research. The internal consistency of the SLWAI was measured using Cronbach's alpha to confirm its reliability. For the qualitative data, member-checking was conducted to validate the accuracy of the interview transcripts, and peer debriefing was employed to enhance the credibility of the thematic analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to ethical guidelines throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the survey and interview phases. Participants were also given the option to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

This mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data, provided a holistic view of writing anxiety among pre-service English teachers and helped uncover the specific factors that contributed to their anxiety levels. The results from this study can be used to inform interventions aimed at reducing writing anxiety and improving the writing skills of future teachers.

RESULT

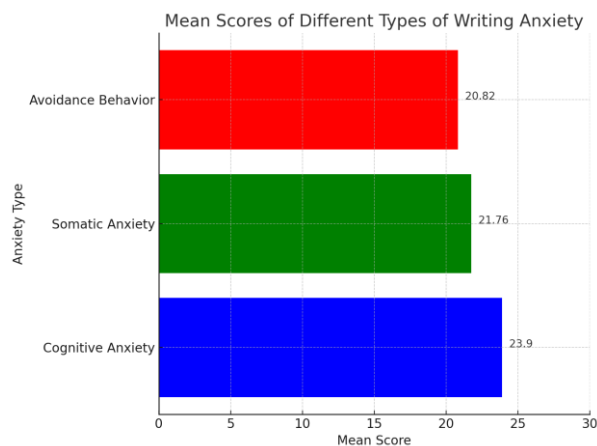


Figure 1. The mean score of different types of Writing Anxiety

The findings of this study revealed significant levels of writing anxiety among the pre-service English teachers at Universitas Negeri Jember. The data collected from the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) and follow-up interviews provided insights into the prevalence of different types of writing anxiety and their underlying causes. The mean score of different types of Writing Anxiety can be seen in Figure 1.

Quantitative Results

Out of the 40 participants, 53% reported experiencing varying levels of writing anxiety. The analysis of the three dimensions of anxiety revealed the following mean scores:

Cognitive Anxiety: 23.9

Somatic Anxiety: 21.76

Avoidance Behavior Anxiety: 20.82

As shown in the figure, cognitive anxiety was the most prevalent form of anxiety among the participants, followed by somatic anxiety and avoidance behavior anxiety. This indicates that the students primarily experienced worry and fear related to their writing performance, which often manifested as concerns about their ability to organize ideas and express themselves clearly. Physical symptoms of anxiety, such as nervousness and tension, were also reported, but to a lesser extent. Avoidance behavior, where students tended to avoid writing tasks altogether, was the least dominant but still significant.

Qualitative Results

The follow-up interviews revealed several key factors contributing to the high levels of writing anxiety:

1. **Insufficient Writing Practice:** Many students mentioned that they had not had enough practice writing in English, which led to a lack of confidence when faced with writing assignments.

2. **Language Barriers:** Difficulty in mastering English grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure was another common source of anxiety. Students often felt that their language skills were inadequate for writing effectively.
3. **Lack of Writing Techniques:** Several participants indicated that they were unsure about the proper techniques for writing paragraphs, which contributed to their anxiety. They reported feeling overwhelmed by the expectations of academic writing.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the prevalence of writing anxiety among pre-service English teachers at Universitas Negeri Jember, with cognitive anxiety emerging as the most dominant form. This suggests that the students' primary struggle lies in their mental and emotional concerns over their writing abilities. The high mean score for cognitive anxiety (23.9) points to the students' fears about making mistakes, organizing their ideas, and producing coherent writing. These worries seemingly stem from their limited experience in writing and inadequate exposure to the processes of drafting and revising, which are essential components of effective writing instruction. Additionally, the presence of somatic anxiety (mean score of 21.76) indicates that this group also experiences physical symptoms of nervousness, suggesting that writing assignments may trigger stress and discomfort, further hindering their performance.

The relatively high levels of avoidance behavior anxiety (mean score of 20.82) underscore the tendency of some students to avoid writing tasks altogether, which can be detrimental to their progress. This avoidance behavior might be a defense mechanism to cope with their writing insecurities (Sa'adah, 2020). It reflects a lack of motivation or a fear of failure, which, if left unaddressed, could perpetuate a cycle of poor writing skills and increased anxiety (Faismaul Ro'ufiyati & Mahbub, 2023; Quvanch & Kew, 2022). The combination of cognitive, somatic, and avoidance anxieties presents a complex picture, suggesting that writing anxiety is multifaceted and requires targeted interventions (Ramadea & Setyadi, 2023).

The interview results reinforce the quantitative findings, revealing that insufficient writing practice, language difficulties, and a lack of writing technique were significant contributors to writing anxiety (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Kurniawati & Anam, 2023). These factors are consistent with previous research, which has shown that writing anxiety often results from a lack of familiarity with writing conventions and inadequate linguistic competence (Reimers et al., 2020). The interviews also suggest that the students may not be receiving enough feedback or opportunities to engage in process-oriented writing activities, which could help build confidence in their writing skills (Wibowo, 2013).

Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach to teaching writing. Educators must create a supportive environment that encourages practice without fear of judgment, incorporating more opportunities for peer review, revision, and individualized feedback (Kawengian & Subekti,

2023; Suyanto Agus, 1990). Enhancing students' understanding of writing techniques, such as brainstorming, outlining, and drafting, will not only reduce cognitive anxiety, but also foster a sense of ownership over their writing (Alfino, 2014; Sulistiyo, 2015). By focusing on the underlying causes of writing anxiety, teacher education programs can better equip future educators with the skills and confidence needed to teach writing effectively to their students (Ghafar, 2023).

In sum, the findings suggest a need for more targeted pedagogical strategies to reduce writing anxiety among pre-service teachers. Addressing both the emotional and instructional dimensions of writing anxiety is crucial for developing confident, competent educators who can pass on effective writing skills to their own students in the future.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the levels and dimensions of writing anxiety among pre-service English teachers at Universitas Negeri Jember in 2024. The results revealed that writing anxiety is a significant issue, with 53% of participants experiencing various forms of anxiety, particularly cognitive anxiety. Cognitive anxiety, characterized by fear and worry about writing tasks, was found to be the most prevalent, followed by somatic anxiety, which involves physical symptoms, and avoidance behavior anxiety, where students tend to evade writing assignments. These findings indicate that pre-service teachers struggle with mental blocks and physical tension when faced with writing tasks, largely due to insufficient writing practice, language difficulties, and a lack of effective writing techniques.

Understanding the different dimensions of writing anxiety is crucial for addressing the issue holistically. Cognitive anxiety reflects students' self-doubt and lack of confidence in their writing abilities, while somatic and avoidance behavior anxieties further complicate their learning process. Therefore, interventions should focus on building students' writing confidence, improving their language proficiency, and providing more structured writing instruction.

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