

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN WRITING ANXIETY AMONG EFL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: A SURVEY STUDY AT UNIVERSITAS JAMBI

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Abstract: Writing is a skill that is necessary for success in the academic world. Writing is a necessary activity in education that fosters significant growth in both teaching and learning. However, good writing requires a variety of skills, including a wide vocabulary, the capacity for contextual understanding, analytical strength, the capacity for inference, the capacity for critical thought, and much more. This skill is unquestionably difficult to acquire, especially when writing in English, which naturally puts more pressure and anxiety on students. This study was designed to investigate the types and levels of writing anxiety experienced by EFL undergraduate students taking an academic writing course at an English department at Universitas Jambi, regardless of their gender. There were 225 students who participated in the study. Majority of them 82.2% (185 students) were female and only 17.8% (40 students) were male. The results showed that somatic anxiety was the most common type of writing anxiety among the students, followed by cognitive anxiety and avoidance behaviour. The findings showed that compared to their peers, female students experience higher levels of writing anxiety. The highest score of the two genders is in the somatic anxiety, women have a mean score of 3.36 and the other counterparts was 3.07. In this study, it was found that the third semester students felt more anxious than the other semesters, particularly in somatic anxiety.

Keywords: *EFL Students; gender; types of writing anxiety; writing anxiety.*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is unquestionably one of the useful language abilities that students must acquire when learning foreign languages, particularly when learning English. Writing proficiency is difficult

for non-native language learners to acquire since it necessitates mastery of both linguistic and non-linguistic components that are organized into writing (Abrar et al., 2023; Sabti et al., 2019). Regular, complete sentences should also be used

in writing, and grammar and spelling should be carefully considered when expressing ideas.

In addition to linguistic factors, other factors that contribute to difficulty learning foreign languages include the way society discourages learning English, learners' shyness, which keeps them from speaking the language out of fear of making mistakes, lack of motivation, and the impact of crowded and small class sizes (Alsalihi, 2020). Anxiety is one example of an affective element that can prevent learners from becoming more proficient English language learners (Salamatkyzy, 2020). Additionally, Kucuk (2023) asserts that worry is likely to manifest itself in both productive (writing and speaking) and receptive (reading and listening) skills. Foreign language anxiety is a psychological condition that affects people who have difficulty learning foreign languages and interferes with their ability to perform well in language classes.

Foreign language scholars and practitioners are increasingly concerned with anxiety when it comes to writing in foreign languages (Kucuk, 2023; Wern and Rahmat, 2021; Rasool et al., 2023; Miri and Joia, 2018; Rabadi and Rabadi, 2020). In addition to its cognitive aspects, writing is an emotionally charged activity. Gender is one of the factors that determines the degree of anxiety, according to certain research findings on the fear of writing in a foreign language. As demonstrated by Salikin's (2019) study, which involved 260 English majors at a university in East Java and revealed a statistically significant relationship between gender and anxiety levels when writing compositions in English. His study's findings indicate that women are more anxious than males when writing in English. Al-Kubaisy, Hummadi and Turki (2019); Geckin (2020); Piniel, K., & Zólyomi, A. (2022), who discovered that women did better than males in writing anxiety, also corroborated the findings of this study.

In addition to gender, there are a number of other reasons why students frequently experience anxiety when writing in English. Because they are unsure about grammar rules and the evaluation process for their work, students experience anxiety (Kucuk, 2023; Rohmah and Muslim, 2021; Rasool et al., 2023). Other factors that contribute to writing anxiety include not having a negative attitude toward writing, feeling under pressure to produce flawless writing, lacking experience, having bad writing experiences, and not knowing enough about academic writing (Handayani, et al., 2020; Rohmah & Muslim,

2021). Based on the findings of the researcher's study (2021) on the difficulties faced by student teacher candidates when writing argumentative essays, sociocultural elements in our nation are to blame for students' hesitation to engage in dialogue or ask questions of their lecturers. Discussing with their peers makes students feel more at ease (Fajaryani et al., 2021).

There are a number of studies on anxiety levels, gender, and variables influencing anxiety when writing in a foreign language in the literature (Wahyuni et al. 2019; Wern and Rahmat, 2021; Kucuk, 2023; Kusumaningputri et al., 2018; Miri and Joia, 2018; Salikin, 2019). The majority of the aforementioned studies have been content-focused, meeting the needs for academic research and literature on general anxiety in EFL students as well as on particular abilities. Although this inquiry, at glance, may not be really different from other previous studies, but the difference lies in the analysis. All previous studies tended to use descriptive statistics which identified the level and type of writing anxiety individually, this study used inferential statistics, Manova, which measured the group level and type of writing anxiety. Another distinction of this study is the level of study. Most previous study examined writing anxiety of a particular year of EFL students, the data of this study were taken from different year of EFL learners (1st, 2nd, and 3rd year students). From this, we expected to get more comprehensive data to fill the gap in the study.

The current study is intended to investigate the significance types of anxiety and the significance level writing anxiety across gender of EFL students in EFL Academic Writing course at English Department of one university in Jambi, given the importance of examining the differences in type and level of anxiety among EFL students in academic writing courses at one university in Jambi that have not been extensively explored in previous research. The following research questions served as the study's guidance in order to fulfil its objective: (1) Does the type of writing anxiety experienced by EFL students differ significantly from gender to gender? (2) Does the degree of writing anxiety experienced by EFL students change significantly from gender to gender?

METHOD

The quantitative method is used in this study because it can provide, convey, and assist researchers in collecting and analyzing data. This

method is also consistent with the study's goal of assessing EFL student writing anxiety. According to Ghanad (2023), quantitative research involves quantifying things and asking questions such as "how long," "how many," and "the degree to which." Quantitative research attempts to measure the information and extrapolate conclusions from a sample of research from several angles. Quantitative research emphasizes objective measurement and statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data gathered through polls, questionnaires, and surveys, as well as manipulating existing statistical data with computational techniques. It is concerned with gathering numerical data and generalizing it across populations or explaining specific phenomena.

The researchers used a survey design to collect data. The purpose of this survey is to validate respondents' behavior and beliefs. Because they simplify and measure respondents' attitudes or behaviors, most quantitative surveys use checklists and ranking scale question types. Knowing that the sample size required for this study is quite large based on the wealth of data obtained. The reason for this is that in quantitative research, larger sample sizes are believed to yield more precise statistical computations compared to smaller sample sizes. As a result, this research sample includes English Education students in the third, fifth, and seventh semesters who have taken or are pursuing academic writing courses. The following table shows the total population of the students from the academic year 2019/2020 to 2021/2022:

Table 1. Total population of EFL students in English Education since 2019-2021

Academic Years	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
2019/2020 (Semester 3)	24	106	130
2020/2021 (Semester 5)	19	60	79
2021/2022 (Semester 7)	19	94	113
Total	62	260	322

Source: Department of English Education 2022

This is a form of purposive sampling where a researcher chooses to study an entire population that possesses a specified set of features. This approach is most effective when the overall population is easily controllable, such as in a certain subgroup of the wider population. This research was carried out in 2022 at the English Education Study Program, part of the Language and Art Department in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at a university in Jambi. The research was conducted during the odd semesters when the students were enrolled.

A questionnaire is necessary to gather data through the survey method. A questionnaire is a research instrument comprising a sequence of inquiries specifically formulated to get valuable information from participants. The instrument comprises a series of written or oral inquiries presented in the format of an interview. Questionnaires can be categorized as either qualitative or quantitative, and they can be filled out through online platforms, over the phone, on physical paper, or in face-to-face interactions. It is not appropriate to ask questions directly to the current researchers.

Furthermore, questionnaires are an excellent choice for a specific method due to their ability to swiftly, effectively, and economically gather a

substantial volume of data from a significant sample size. This tool is very effective for assessing the subject's behaviour, preferences, intentions, attitudes, and opinions. Researchers can employ open-ended and closed-ended research questions to collect quantitative data, resulting in more comprehensive results.

This study utilized Cheng's Second Language Writing Concern Inventory (SLWAI) questionnaire, which was published in 2004. The questionnaire has 22 closed items. Each participant completes a closed questionnaire with 5 (five) Likert Scale items "1-strongly disagree," "2-disagree," "3-unsure," "4-agree," and "5-strongly agree." Consequently, after compiling the questionnaire, the researchers distributed it to a predetermined sample. After successfully obtaining data from each of these samples, researchers collected in accordance with a predetermined pattern.

Data analysis is a crucial component of research as it enhances the ease and accuracy of research data. This facilitates researchers' effective interpretation of the data, ensuring that no valuable insights are overlooked. Data analysis involves the systematic examination of numerical or quantifiable data or data that can be readily

transformed into numerical form without compromising its meaning.

To analyze the data, descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (MANOVA) were used. Descriptive statistics were employed to report the respondents' responses, while inferential statistics were used to investigate relationships and differences among various sample characteristics. In this research, analyzing data involved several steps. The first step in data analysis is to process the questionnaire responses. The information gathered from closed questionnaires was analyzed with Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS 25. The researchers examined the questionnaire's item scores. The Likert Scale and converted score used to assess the student's foreign language anxiety are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *The converted score of the frequency*

Frequency	The converted score
Strongly Disagree	1
Disagree	2
Unsure	3
Agree	4
Strongly Agree	5

The SLWAI questionnaire (Cheng, 2004) consists of three categories: Cognitive Anxiety (1,3,7,9,14,17,20,21), Somatic Anxiety (2,6,8,11,13,15,19), and Avoidance Behavior (4,5,10,12,16,18,22).

Table 3. *The mean level of writing anxiety*

Mean Score
1.00-1.80 = Very low
1.81-2.60 = Low
2.61-3.20 = Medium
3.21-4.20 = High
4.21-5.00 = Very High

The researchers utilized the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) developed

by Cheng (2004) due to its strong internal consistency, reliable testing reliability, sufficient concentration, and validity associated with satisfactory criteria (Cheng, 2004). The questions created by each have specifications that allow researchers to categorize the answers based on their location. This questionnaire is a reliable instrument for assessing EFL writing anxiety. It was selected as a measure of writing anxiety because it has demonstrated high reliability and validity through correlation and factor analysis, making it a preferred choice among researchers.

The internal consistency of the 22-item SLWAI was assessed using Cronbach's coefficient, which yielded a reliability estimate of .91 for both administrations of the scale. Furthermore, a series of coefficients were calculated by removing one item at a time from the scale. All these coefficients were around .91, indicating that removing any item would not improve the overall reliability of the SLWAI. The correlation between scores obtained from the two administrations of the SLWAI was also computed, resulting in a test-retest reliability estimate of .85. These findings suggest that the SLWAI is highly internally consistent and demonstrates respectable temporal stability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Researchers currently divide the anxiety associated with writing foreign languages by gender. In order to determine which gender experienced higher levels of anxiety and which type of anxiety the participant was more predominant in, researchers used the Manova test to compare the types of anxiety associated with writing foreign language (cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior anxiety).

Table 4. *Gender and types of writing anxiety*

No	Characteristics	Aspect	Content	Mean	F	Sig/P value	
1	Cognitive		Female	3.27	9.77	.002	
			Male	2.96			
	Somatic		Female	3.36	5.93	.016	
			Male	3.07			
	Avoidance Behaviour		Female	2.54	0.66	.416	
			Male	2.46			
MANOVA							
			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.

Cognitive	Between Groups	3.107	1	3.107	9.776	.002
	Within Groups	70.871	223	.318		
	Total	73.978	224			
Somatic	Between Groups	2.678	1	2.678	5.927	.016
	Within Groups	100.740	223	.452		
	Total	103.417	224			
Avoidance	Between Groups	.186	1	.186	.664	.416
	Within Groups	62.440	223	.280		
	Total	62.625	224			

The gender differences in each of the three domains—cognitive, somatic, and avoidance behaviour—are explained by the Manova test (table 4) above. 1) The significance p-value of 0.002 is observed from the cognitive perspective. It can be concluded that there is a gender difference between males and females because the p-value is less than 0.05. 2) The table indicates that the somatic component's p-value is $0.015 < 0.05$. This indicates that there are somatic differences between the sexes. Thus, it can be concluded that the alternative hypothesis is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected. 3)

The p value for the avoidance behaviour component is $0.416 > 0.05$. This computation leads to the following conclusion: there is no difference between male and female in the avoidance aspect. So, H_0 is accepted and H_1 is rejected. At this point, the researchers compared the levels of writing anxiety in each semester to look for variations. Three semesters, namely semesters 3, 5 and 7, are evaluated using samples collected by researchers. The MANOVA test was used by researchers to determine their anxiety levels and the types of these three semesters.

Table 5. Academic year and types of writing anxiety

No	Characteristics	types	Content	Mean	F	Sig/P value
1	Semester	Cognitive	Semester 3	3.30	1.97	.142
			Semester 5	3.19		
			Semester 7	3.12		
		Somatic	Semester 3	3.40	3.65	.028
			Semester 5	3.35		
			Semester 7	3.12		
		Avoidance	Semester 3	2.49	2.97	.053
			Semester 5	2.66		
			Semester 7	2.45		

MANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Cognitive	Between Groups	1.289	2	.644	1.968	.142
	Within Groups	72.689	222	.327		
	Total	73.978	224			
Somatic	Between Groups	3.290	2	1.645	3.647	.028
	Within Groups	100.128	222	.451		
	Total	103.417	224			
Avoidance	Between Groups	1.633	2	.817	2.972	.053
	Within Groups	60.992	222	.275		
	Total	62.625	224			

Table 5. Manova (above) describes the variations in cognitive, physical, and avoidance aspects according to the semester. The table shows that the p value for the cognitive component is $0.14 > 0.05$. Given that the p-value exceeds the significance value, it can be said that there is no variation in the cognitive aspect of the students in any given semester. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted. For the second aspect of anxiety, which is the somatic aspect, it is seen that the p value is $0.03 < 0.05$. This means that there are

differences in the somatic aspect based on the semester where the students are in. So, H_1 is accepted and H_0 is rejected. On the other hand, since the p value for the avoidance aspect is $0.053 > 0.05$, which is greater than 0.05, there is no difference in the avoidance aspect. This indicates that every semester is the same. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted.

The sorts of writing anxiety that students experience most frequently were identified by the researchers through their study. All respondents

reported experiencing one of the three types of writing anxiety related to academic writing; nevertheless, somatic anxiety was ranked highest, followed by cognitive anxiety and avoidance behaviour. Several related research mostly found that cognitive anxiety was the predominant type students reported (Leon et al., 2023), Quvanch & Si Na (2022), Biri (2022), Aunurrahman (2019), and Salikin (2019). The study's responses and circumstances may have contributed to the disparate results. The results of this study are consistent with those of Gen C & Yangli (2019) and Arindra & Ardi (2020), where students reported somatic anxiety as their most common kind of anxiety. On the other hand, a study by Prasetyaningrum et al., (2021) found that the majority of students in academic writing classes engaged in avoidance behaviour.

The current investigation found that there are cognitive differences between male and female students. Compared to their male peers, female students were more anxious. In this study, male students scored 2.96, while female students scored 3.27 on average. The term "cognitive anxiety" describes the cerebral side of anxiety, which includes unfavourable expectations, mentally taxing performances, and worries about how other people see us. Stated differently, cognitive anxiety is linked to the functions and operations of the human brain. When you're anxious, consider failures like "I won't solve it" and self-deprecating statements like "I am terrible at writing."

Here, female students in the research had a tendency to fear criticism from peers or lecturers. They also pretended to avoid negative evaluation of their writing performance. Respondents in this study might be afraid of getting low grade in the academic writing course and affect their Grade Point Average (GPA). The results are consistent with Wern and Rahmat's study (2021), which indicated that among Chinese Independent school writers, cognitive anxiety was the most common type of writing anxiety. A similar finding also found in Quvanch & Si Na's study (2022) that investigated 133 undergraduates Afghan EFL students. The results showed that there was a modest amount of writing anxiety, with cognitive anxiety predominating.

Similar results are also evident in Salikin's (2019) study conducted in Indonesia, involving 260 English Department students at a public university in East Java. His findings revealed, students continue to worry that their English composition is inferior to that of others.

The findings of this study show that female students experience higher levels of writing anxiety than male students in the somatic anxiety category. The mean score of female students was 3.36, whilst the other counterparts were 3.07. Somatic anxiety refers to an individual's experience of the physiological consequences of anxiety, manifested in the induction of uncomfortable and persistent emotions of autonomy, like tension and anxiety. The results of recent study indicates that the university's English Education

students in Jambi frequently experience physical symptoms while writing in English, such as trembling, cold, and other physical symptoms. When students felt physically unwell, they developed somatic anxiety (Arindra & Ardi, 2020). As for the recent study, it was carried out in the post-pandemic transitional period between online and face-to-face learning, with the respondents answering a closed-ended questionnaire. This condition might influence students' learning styles, in which they are required to complete their writing tasks in restricted provided time. In addition, students in this study could not perform well in doing their composition and correcting their work. This similar finding also supports the result of Fajaryani's study (2021) that shows undergraduate students felt not easy to finish their academic writing assignments, particularly they were required to write a timed essay.

Male and female students seemed to have similar attitudes when comparing the avoidance behaviour feature. The findings of the study show that there is no gender difference in this kind of anxiousness. Both female and male students possess certain attitude or behavior when they are asked to complete their writing composition. The students tend to neglect to accomplish the task or get procrastination due to their lack of linguistic competence and knowledge about writing paragraphs and essays (Arindra & Ardi, 2020). The current study validates the findings of Prasetyaningrum et al. (2021), which examined the causes and varieties of writing anxiety at Hamzanwadi University's English Education study program in Nusa Tenggara Barat, Indonesia. Their research revealed that avoidance behaviour, which was the most common type among the other forms of writing anxiety that could be determined by the highest mean score, had the highest writing anxiety. Additionally, their research showed that writing anxiety is mostly caused by four factors. They included a high frequency of writing assignments, a lack of writing confidence, time constraints, and difficulty selecting topics.

It was discovered that female students exhibited the greatest levels of worry and anxiousness among all the forms of writing anxiety that EFL undergraduate students in this study encountered. The mean score for male and female students both demonstrates this. The present findings are consistent with those of Salikin (2019) and Rasool et al. (2022), who report that females exhibit superior writing anxiety compared to males. Both male and female students in Salikin's 2019 study experienced high levels of cognitive anxiety; however, their cognitive responses to worry varied. Anxiety is experienced by both genders for the same reasons. Their inability to communicate in language causes them anxiety. While there was no variation in anxiety levels between genders, Rasool et al.'s (2022) results were similar in that they showed a distinct pattern for the cognitive anxiety type. The current research found that no statistically significant distinction between male and female students experiencing different forms of writing anxiety.

Clearly, their lack of experience writing in English causes them to feel uneasy. This circumstance causes students to have some language issues, including vocabulary and grammar. Besides, students also have to complete their English writing composition under time constraints. The results of this study align with those of Aloardhi (2019), who determined the factors contributing to writing anxiety in women attending select Saudi colleges.

The findings of this study show that the third semester is the one with the most anxiety, and somatic anxiety is the most prevalent type. It can be assumed that the third semester students need to adjust their learning styles especially when they need to complete their writing assignments. The findings indicated that the students had more struggles physiologically in academic writing compared to the other semesters.

The results of this study show that all students, regardless of semester, stated that they felt a great deal of anxiety when writing. This indicates that the semester has no bearing on a person's degree of writing anxiety. The results are consistent with Biri's study (2022), which found that there are no gender- or year-specific differences in the kind, degree, or causes of writing anxiety. Comparable findings were reported by Wahyuni et al. (2019), demonstrating that students, irrespective of their academic year, suffer from a moderate degree of writing anxiety. In contrast to students who have a high or low level of writing anxiety, their data showed that there are more students at every academic level who are somewhat nervous. According to a recent study, there are no appreciable differences between semesters. Every student in the third, fifth, and seventh semesters had a tendency to be terrified of receiving a poor grade or remark from the lecturers. In addition, they are afraid of facing writing test under time pressure.

It is possible for writing anxiety to have a beneficial influence on students' English writing at specific times and in specific ways, rather than just having a negative one (AlFarwan, 2021). Applying collaborative work in pairs or small groups for concept generation and essay construction is one way to help students feel less anxious when writing (Jawas, 2019). The findings of Fajaryani et al. (2021) attest to the fact that male and female students employed distinct academic writing styles. While female students choose cognitive tactics over social strategies, male students favoured using social strategies.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicated that male and female students have distinct anxiety experiences when writing English. This distinction is not immediately apparent, though. The different types of anxiety are reflected in the variance in mean scores for each gender. For both genders, the somatic anxiety type had the highest score (3.07 for males and 3.36 for females). This finding suggests that anxiety is a greater problem for female students than for male students.

Female students are more likely to have somatic anxiety when writing, which can manifest as a variety of bodily symptoms including trembling in the body, feeling cold, having trouble breathing, and many more. The results show that students encountered all forms of writing anxiety throughout every semester, indicating that there is no discernible variation in the categories of writing anxiety by semester. Compared to the previous semester, students experienced a higher level of somatic anxiety throughout their third semester. It is advised that future research look at the causes or contributing variables to writing anxiety in EFL students of both genders.

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