

Anxiety and Writing Ability of Filipino ESL Learners

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ABSTRACT

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The study aimed at describing how L2 anxiety of writing affected the Filipino English as Second Language (ESL) learners' ability in writing. It also showed the anxiety rates, foremost type; then, the learners' writing ability. Thirty-three grade 10 ESL learners participated in. The utilization of Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) which was proposed by Cheng, and a written test as one of the requirements of their subject was done for data collection. 82% of learners marked high anxiety in writing, 18% was moderate anxiety, and none was recorded low anxiety. The leading type of anxiety in writing was cognitive; then the somatic; lastly, the avoidance behavior. In the writing ability, learners were satisfactorily rated and male and female writing ability did not significantly differ. A negatively low correlated, inverse relationship of SLWAI and performance was found between anxiety in writing and Filipino ESL learners' ability in writing using a second or foreign language. This implies that the greater the learners were anxious in writing, the lesser the achievement that a learner may have.

Introduction

Globally, English is the language which is used mostly in communication. In the Philippines, English as second language or L2 is taught as one of the required subjects until college years. Students should master the language for them to pass the subject. Language teaching in the Philippines seems to be an important concern for language teachers because English is not the first language of the Filipinos. Linguistic skills such as writing, reading, and viewing, speaking, and listening should become skilled at by ESL learners.

Writing is primary skill that should be taught and learned among ESL learners. People can use writing as one way to communicate ideas and information. For learners, communicating what they feel and think can be completed through writing.

However, using second language (i.e. English) is not easy for learners to write. The researcher interviewed among fellow teachers of English, majority of learners still exhibited problems and hitches in paragraph writing. They could not express the ideas systematically and meaningfully. In addition, students have found out that they were not consistent with their grammar. Issues on verb forms, punctuations, capitalizations, spelling have been the primary concerns of teachers in writing activities of students. The issues presented are strengthened by Ur (2000). He agreed that learners committed mistakes in terms writing of mechanics, in punctuating, capitalizing proper names, and also spelling of the words. Learners were poor in grammar and used inappropriate words for compositions. They could not connect ideas from one sentence to the others. Confusion on how to introduce their thoughts in the beginning of the paragraph and do not know expound this in the next paragraph is observed on

their write-ups. This results in producing writing without coherence and unity. ESL Filipino learners have had difficulty in writing essays as part of the English curriculum.

Researchers and theorists focused on L2 acquisition or learning have long been cognizant that anxiety is regularly related to learning a second or foreign language. Educators and learners commonly feel that anxiety is a major hindrance to be overcome in second language learning (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). There are studies that explore the different perceptions about foreign language anxiety in writing which are also related to learners' gender (Cheng, 2002; Jafari et al., 2012; Marwan, 2007; Mathew et al., 2013), the present study attempts to examine not only the level of second/foreign language anxiety in writing and gender but also its effect on the Filipino ESL students writing ability.

Literature Review

The writing process includes substance and content, organization of ideas, choice of vocabulary, language features, and mechanics. A writing task encompasses the use of simple sentences to complex or essays. Putting, discovering, and organizing feelings, beliefs, and the ideas through symbols and through a well-constructed text make the whole process. Developing these writing requires the learners to follow the process of learning on getting ideas, putting them together, getting them on the paper, and refining them into a piece of writing (Umaemah et al. 2016).

Moreover, one essential skill in language is writing. Writing is the skill that emphasis mechanical aspects of writing and grammar level, which attempt to replicate the processes of thinking and textual convention of discourse community (Johnson and Lin, 2016 and Shea, 2017). Relating to the gray areas on the significance of writing in English learning and the students' struggles in writing, Raimes (1983), indicates certain causes that specify the meaning of teaching writing. It first supports the grammatical structure, idiom, and vocabulary in which the teachers use in the class. These students are free to explore with the English language while writing. Also, students are totally involved in the language with the readers and themselves.

In addition, Zailaini et al. (2015) describe writing as a challenging undertaking, particularly for those who come from the EFL/ESL setting. In 2002, Cheng emphasized as an emotional and cognitive activity, students think and feel while they are writing. Writing using L2 is also deliberated as a complex method of social, cultural and background aspects, and of the learner's distinct characteristics, such as institutional requirements, parental or shared anticipations, training and assessment procedures, motivation, personality, self-confidence, learner's belief, L2 proficiency, and even gender and years in school.

Anxiety is perceived to be a crucial occurrence in the acquisition or learning of a language which is established to be an undesirable factor. It makes a vital role in the realization of learning or the lack of it. Language teachers have engaged great interest in exploring this language anxiety which, as thought of, hampers learning in the recent years (Elaldi, 2016).

In 2004, Cheng presented a multidimensional L2 writing scale – the SLWAI which conforms to a three-dimensional conceptualization of anxiety, the avoidance behavior, cognitive and somatic anxieties. Referring to the cognitive aspect of anxiety experience, it includes undesirable prospects, uneasiness with performance and concern about others' insight. The psychological effects such as being nervous and tensed as perceived by a person is an anxiety experience or the Somatic. The last type refers to an anxiety where the students avoid writing or Avoidance behavior anxiety.

Factors related to second language writing anxiety were also analyzed by Cheng in 2002. She also offered the SLWAI, an instrument to use to measure the levels and types of L2 writing anxiety (Cheng, 2004).

According to Ratnah (2018), a purposive message to a reader can be delivered by learners through writing. Learner can clarify things, and the reader can get information by reading the written messages. The assessment of language competency, recalling capability, and thinking ability is found to be the cognitive side of a productive writing skill (Javed et al. 2013).

Gender has become one of defining variables that impacts the level of anxiety in a study about writing conducted by Cheng in 2002 among the 165 students majoring in English in a university in Northern Taiwan. The study, concentrated on the anxiety in writing by gender. This revealed that gender significantly affected the level of anxiety in English writing. Consequently, learners' gender is considered an aspect relative to the high anxiety in English learning (Berk, 2017).

It is the task for the teachers of English to regulate the learners' anxiety in writing that affects their ability to write using L2 to provide better and more favorable writing experiences among learners.

Methodology

The researchers employed correlational research design. Primarily, assessing relationships, consistency, and prediction among variables is the main purpose of the application (Ary et al., 2010). It tries to evaluate patterns of relationship among variables in one group of participants. The current study examines the relations of anxiety in writing and the ability of the Filipino learners to write using L2.

Participants

The researchers considered Justino Sevilla High School in the Division of Pampanga, Pampanga, Philippines to be the research site. Purposive sampling was the technique used in selecting the participants. This sampling technique involved the total population to be tested which has particular similarities in terms of specific attributes/traits, experience, knowledge, skills, exposure to an event, etc. (Creswell, 2014). The criterion for sample selection reflected that this sample considering that the participants would provide the necessary data for the purpose of the study. This section is classified as the Grade 10 -Science, Technology and Engineering (STE) in which as early as grade 8, learners have undergone research writing and participated in journalism contests.

Instrument

Given the permission for the utilizing the SLWAI, this 22 item-questionnaire was used to determine the participants' level and the type of anxiety. SLWAI is used as a measure of writing anxiety because it has been proved highly reliable and valid (Cheng, 2004). A 0.91 Cronbach alpha coefficient, this SLWAI has good internal consistency (Cheng, 2004), in addition, it extensively measures the foreign/second language writing anxiety among students (Rezaei & Jafari, 2014).

It followed the 5-point Likert scale with the descriptions, strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), uncertain (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). Items 1,3,7,9,14,17,20, and 21 were distributed for Cognitive Anxiety while items, Somatic Anxiety 2,6,8,11,13,15, and 19, and items 4,5,10,12,16,18, and 22 were for Somatic and Avoidance behavior, respectively.

65 points and above shows a high level of writing anxiety while 50 points and below designates to low level of writing anxiety, and the moderate level of writing anxiety has total score of 51- 64. SLWAI is deliberated as being "highly reliable and valid by means of correlation and factor analysis" (Kirmızı and Kirmızı, 2015, p. 59).

The present had .75 as the computed Cronbach alpha coefficient of which is described *acceptable* of all 22 items included in the questionnaire; thus, utilizing the SLWAI has a consistent validity and reliability for this study.

Meanwhile, the researchers gave a 50-60-minute writing task to the participants to accomplish. They also considered the significance to Filipino ESL perspective as center for learners' essays. These were assessed adapting the scale of Jacobs et al. (1981) by Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1992) in composition writing.

Content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics were the criteria focused in the assessment. The researchers followed a 1 to 50-point scale in rating the essays. English writing ability of learners was determined by their scores in the writing task.

Collection and Analysis of Data

Writing an essay using English as the targeted language, the researchers gave the learners the topic and 50-60 minutes-time allotment to finish the task. Given with twenty minutes, participants were asked to accomplish the SLWAI. 65 points and above shows a high level of writing anxiety while 50 points and below designates to low level of writing anxiety, and the moderate level of writing anxiety has total score of 51- 64. (Rezaei, M. & Jafari, M, 2014).

Items 1,3,7,9,14,17,20, and 21 were distributed for Cognitive Anxiety while items, Somatic Anxiety 2,6,8,11,13,15, and 19, and items 4,5,10,12,16,18, and 22 were for Somatic and Avoidance behavior, respectively. The researchers used SPSS version 20 for the analysis of the level and type anxiety in writing experienced by ESL Filipino learner from the data collected. The responses

to SLWAI were examined descriptively (frequency and mean) using SPSS version 20. Meanwhile, Pearson r determined how the SLWAI affected ability of the Filipino ESL learners' ability in writing.

Results and Discussion

1. How does the writing anxiety level of Filipino ESL learners be described?

Table 1. Descriptive level of SLWAI (General)

	n	Lowest	Highest	Mean
High level of anxiety	27	65	88	57.25
Moderate level of anxiety	6	51	64	12.72
Low level of anxiety	0	22	50	0.0
Total	33	56	88	69.97

This table 1 shows the level of the SLWAI of Filipino ESL learners. A high level of writing anxiety (Mean score = 69.97 >65 points) felt by Filipino ESL learners. Possible scores of the participants for the survey range from 22 to 110. In which, this study shows that participants scored from 56 to 88 points. 69.75 Which is greater than 65 was marked with a high level of anxiety.

Furthermore, 27 learners (82%) scored greater than 65 points which happened to be high anxiety level. It indicated that the level L2 writing anxiety of Filipino ESL learners is high. This is alarming and revealing that there is insufficiency of the locally contextualized writing tasks and processes.

This coincides with the findings of Jebreil, Azizifar, Gowhary, and Jamalinesari (2015); Rezaei and Jafari (2014); Wahyuni and Umam (2017). However, Salikin (2019) reported a medium level of anxiety experienced by learners of English as Foreign Language in Indonesia

2. How do Filipino ESL learners' types of anxiety in writing be described?

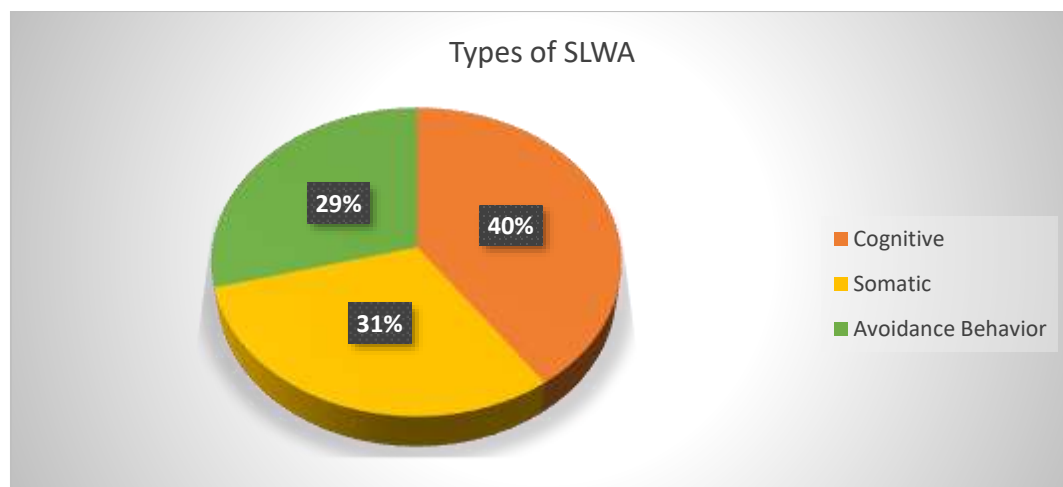


Fig. 1. Distribution of the three categories of ESL anxiety in writing

This figure 1 illustrates the three categories of ESL anxiety in writing. SLWAI suggests a three-dimensional conceptualization of anxiety- the cognitive, somatic, and avoidance anxieties (Cheng, 2004).

Cognitive anxiety category obtained the 40% which is majority of the Filipino ESL learners experienced when writing. Somatic anxiety is 31 % and avoidance behavioral is 29%. Rezaei and Jafari (2014); Salikin (2019); Zhang (2011); Wahyuni and Umam (2017) found the similar results.

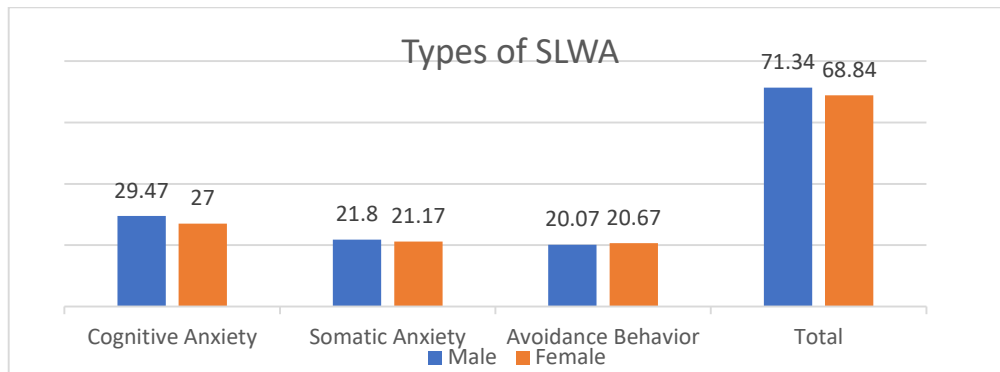


Fig. 2. Comparison between male and female types of SLWA

Figure 2 reveals the types of SLWAI of male and female Filipino ESL learners. It tells the categories of SLWA of male and the Female ESL learners. Cognitive and Somatic types of L2 writing anxiety, males suffered higher levels than females, because males got means of 29.47 (Cognitive) and 21.8 (Somatic) which are higher females’ means of 27 and 21.17, respectively, However, in terms of Avoidance behavior, females had a bit higher than males.

Based on the mean scores, a 2.5 higher obtained by male learners. This reflects that male writers feel higher anxiety than female in essay writing. This finding is supported by Na (2007) who found out that the males experience higher anxiety than females in Chinese EFL classrooms while Mathew, Liz, Tareq, and Islam (2013) and Jafari and Ansari (2012) who discovered that males were outperformed by females in terms of writing anxiety. Consequently, learners’ gender is considered an aspect relative to the high anxiety in English learning (Berk, 2017).

3. What is the level of Filipino ELS learners writing ability?

Table 2. Learners’ writing ability

Level of Writing Ability	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Excellent	6 (18.18%)	45	50	41.55	3.97
Satisfactory	22 (66.66%)	38	45		
Not satisfactory	5 (15.15%)	31	37		
Needs Improvement	0 (0%)	10	30		
Total	33 (100%)	35	49		

Table 3 presents the learners’ writing ability. A mean score of 41.55 indicates that the writing ability of the learners was *satisfactory*. This also revealed that 22 or 66.66% of the learners wrote satisfactorily and only 6 or 18.18% wrote excellently. Five or 15.15% learners were rated not satisfactory. The diverse scores of learners, might probably affected by the writing anxiety.

4. Does male writing ability significantly differ from female?

Table 3. Significant difference of male and female writing ability

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
TestScores	Equal variances assumed	1.756	.195	-1.073	31	.291	-1.489	1.387	-4.318	1.340
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.050	26.364	.303	-1.489	1.418	-4.402	1.425

(Levene's test: $F=1.756$, $p\text{-value}=0.195$, >0.05 ; T-test (equal variances): $T=-1.073$, $p\text{-value}=0.291$, >0.05)

This table 3 shows the difference of male and female writing ability. The difference of English writing ability between male and female learners ($p\text{-value}=0.291$, >0.05) goes beyond significant level of 5%. This means that there was no significant difference

between male and female writing abilities. It only indicates that male and female writers may have more or less the same level of writing ability.

5. Does the level of SLWA significantly affect Filipino ESL learners writing ability?

Table 4. Correlation between SLWA and ESL learners writing ability

Variables	r-value	Relationship
Writing Anxiety vs Writing Ability	-.254	Low

This table 4 presents the correlation between anxiety and writing ability. The computed r-value $-.254$ signified that there was negative low correlation on the writing anxiety and ability of Filipino ESL learners score in writing task. It means that ESL writers who have had higher writing anxiety received lower score in writing task. A similar finding revealed by Zhang (2011) that learners who had found with higher anxiety in writing had lower proficiency grades in writing than those who with lower writing anxiety. Also, Kabigting and Nanud (2020) found out that anxiety affected the performance of the learner inside the classroom.

Conclusion

This purposely describing how L2 anxiety of writing affected the Filipino English as Second Language (ESL) learners' ability in writing. It was found out that Filipino ESL learners were highly anxious in writing essay. Moreover, the leading type of anxiety in writing was cognitive; then the somatic; lastly, the avoidance behavior. Cognitive and Somatic types of L2 writing anxiety, males suffered higher levels than females. In the writing ability, learners were satisfactorily rated and male and female writing ability did not significantly differ. There was negative low correlation on the writing anxiety and ability of Filipino ESL learners score in writing task. It means that ESL writers who have had higher writing anxiety received lower score in writing task. Filipino ESL learners are affected by the writing anxieties they feel when writing. Difficulty in writing due to anxieties may create fear of making mistakes and impede development of writing essay in the target language. This research is only limited to small number of participants, their second language writing anxieties and writing ability. There may be researchers who are willing to use found results of the current to study more and different factors that may affect ESL learners writing ability such as the causes, teaching strategies and motivation in writing.

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