

Figuring out the Levels, Types, and Sources of Writing Anxiety Among Undergrad ESL Students in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Effective English writing skills are essential for students' academic, professional, and even personal growth. Particularly, in a country where The English language is used as a second language or co-official language. Because Effective writing is considered as an instrument to measure students' intellectual ability and academic performance. Anxiety/ apprehension can adversely affect students' English language writing skills due to several factors. The prime objective of this study was to figure out the extent, types, and sources of writing anxiety in undergrad ESL students. 200 ESL undergrad students were selected as the sample for the research study and two survey questionnaires were adopted as a tool for data collection; SLWAI by Cheng (2004) and CWAI by Razaeaia and Jafari (2014). Data analysis indicated that the extent of writing anxiety in undergrad ESL students was moderate and avoidance anxiety was found to be the leading type of anxiety experienced by ESL students. Moreover, fear of writing tests, lack of topic knowledge, pressure for perfection in written work, and fearing of teachers' negative comments and evaluations were found as the main sources of writing anxiety in undergrad ESL students.

1. Introduction

The English language is being used as a medium of instruction in countries like India and Pakistan. and being a proficient user of English in terms of both productive language skills; writing and speaking is a demanded from students for achieving academic and professional excellence. Students are being taught in English from primary till graduate level. At the undergraduate level, they are required to give their sessional tests, credit assignments, and examinations, project, and thesis in English written form. (Dar & Khan, 2015). Fareed et al. (2016) mentioned that writing is known as one of the essential skills in language learning and learners must acquire proficiency in writing skills even though it is a complex and frustrating task perceived by the learners because learners may think they will perform poorly since they do not have adequate knowledge about syntax, language structures, content, organization of ideas and usage of language in a productive way. Students are generally required to write only for assignments and tests. Students might feel apprehensive when they are required to write in English if they do not have sufficient writing practice in class or out of the class.

1.2 Problem Statement

Fareed et al. (2021) asserted that although the English language is being taught in Pakistani educational institutes from the very beginning level, yet students face challenges to acquire basic language skills as cited in Dar & Khan (2015) and they do not have the requisite writing skills. (Khan 2009; Malik, 1996; Mashoori & Iqbal, 2007 as cited in Fareed et al. (2021). They have trouble with formulating, arranging, and integrating appropriate ideas. (Fareed 2009 as mentioned in Fareed et al. 2021). These problems cause due lacking competence in syntax, vocabulary, generating ideas, inadequate use of vocabulary, and content knowledge. These issues can develop a more severe issue identified as writing anxiety. Writing anxiety is generally associated with negative senses such as anxiousness, fear, and tension (Syarifudin,2020). Furthermore, more research studies are required to be conducted to discover and investigate the factors that affect learners' writing skills negatively, because students' writing problems can be dealt with properly if the factors that cause these writing issues can be investigated properly. (Hyland 2003 as cited in Fareed et al 2016).

According to Negari and Rezaabadi (2012 as cited by Toh & Rahmat 2021), anxiety can make learners uncomfortable, dissatisfied, unconfident, and worried which makes ESL/EFL learning a challenging task because learners' concentration is distracted. Writing is perceived as a difficult task whether it is undertaken in one's first language or second language (Toh & Rahmat 2021).

1.3 Aim and objective of the Research Study

The current research study aims to investigate writing anxiety in undergrad ESL students and the following are the objectives of the research study:

- 1) To figure out the levels of writing anxiety in undergrad ESL students.
- 2) To explore the leading type of writing anxiety in undergrad ESL students.
- 3) To find out the key sources of writing anxiety in undergrad ESL students.

2. Literature Review

According to Horwitz (2010, as cited in Ajmal & Irfan, 2020) anxiety is an "individual's experience of tension, nervousness, anxiousness and tension linked with activation of the autonomic nervous system", he was the first to explain that language anxiety or writing anxiety is a kind of situation-specific anxiety that is generated due to specific situation. (Ajmal & Irfan, 2020).

Zhang (2011) examined the levels and effects of writing anxiety on writing performance and perceptions of learners regarding ESL writing anxiety in Chinese students who are majoring in English, involving 49 freshman students and 47 sophomores. He identified cognitive anxiety as the most common type of writing anxiety found in Chinese students and language problems, lack of consistent writing practice, lack of subject-related knowledge, lack of self-confidence while writing was identified as the core causes of writing apprehension among Chinese EFL students.

Cheng (2017, as cited in Ajmal & Irfan, 2020) states that writing anxiety can be classified into three categories: "cognitive, somatic, and avoidance behavior". Somatic anxiety is associated with physiological characteristics such as trembling, perspiring, heart-pounding, uneasiness, and tension. Cognitive anxiety is related to negative perceptions associated with the overall writing process, fear of negative evaluation, and other negative concerns are linked with cognitive anxiety. The third type of writing anxiety is avoidance behavior which is associated with avoiding tasks and activities that require writing.

Dar and Khan (2015) investigated writing anxiety among 418 Pakistani undergraduate students from public and private sector universities through essay writing on different topics. The study used SLWAI by Cheng (2004) to address the research problem. The finding of the study concluded that the majority of participants 61.48% experienced an average level of writing anxiety, 19.38 % of participants had high-level writing anxiety while 19.14% of participants had low-level writing anxiety.

Salikin (2019) investigated the level and factors that cause writing anxiety among male and female EFL Indonesian students. The study employed SLWAI by Cheng (2004) and CWAI by Yonas et al. The findings of the research study indicated that Indonesian EFL learners had an average level of English writing anxiety, cognitive anxiety was the dominant type of anxiety, female students were found to be more anxiety-prone than male students in terms of gender variable and lack of linguistics competence was the main factor that caused writing in Indonesian EFL students.

3. Research Methodology

The quantitative research method was employed to figure out writing anxiety in ESL undergrad students.

3.1 Research Questions

- Q.1 What is the extent of writing anxiety experienced by undergrad ESL students?
- Q.2 What type of anxiety is dominant in undergrad ESL students?
- Q.3 What is the prime source that causes writing among ESL undergrad students?

3.2 Research Design

The process of the research is considered as the crucial point during conducting any research examination. "The most common principle for conducting a research is that all the methods and techniques that are applied to the particular study needed to be proper for answering your questions" as stated by Robson (1993, p.38). The quantitative approach and hand-delivered survey questionnaire research method for data collection was followed to answer the research question.

3.3 sample

To achieve the objectives of the current study the researcher selected 200 undergraduate students enrolled in the English department at a public-sector university in Pakistan for data collection. The random sampling method was employed for data collection.

3.4 Instruments used for Data collection

Two questionnaires were used in this research study for data collection. The first questionnaire was SLWAI by Cheng (2004) was employed for analyzing the level and types of writing anxiety among ESL undergrad students. SLWAI questionnaire contains 22 items and the questionnaire had four choices of response; 1) strongly agree 2) agree 3) disagree 4) Strongly disagree. The questionnaire is divided into three categories; Cognitive anxiety, Avoidance behavior, and Somatic anxiety. The first category Cognitive Anxiety (CA) has the given items; 1, 3, 7, 9, 14, 17, 20, and 21. The second category Somatic Anxiety (SA) has the given items; 2, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15, and 19 and finally the last category is Avoidance Behaviour (AB) has the items 4, 5, 10, 12, 16, 18, and 22. The second questionnaire was the CWAI by Razaeaia and Jafari (2014a) was adopted to explore the sources of writing in ESL undergrad students. The CWAI questionnaire consists of 10- items based on the main causes of writing anxiety.

3.5 Data analysis

The collected data from two questionnaires were analyzed statistically by using statistical software, Statistical Packages for Social Sciences" SPSS version 20, to obtain the descriptive statistics.

4. Results

4.1 Level of writing anxiety in ESL undergrad students

The SLWAI results indicated that most of the participants (79.5%) experienced a moderate level of writing anxiety, 11% of the participants experienced a low level of anxiety, and 9.5% of the expected high level of anxiety.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for SLWAI

| | Number of Students | Minimum Score | Maximum Score | Percentage |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------------|---------------|------------|
| Total | 200 | 40 | 82 | 100% |
| High Anxiety | 19 | 65 | 82 | 9.5% |
| Moderate | 159 | 50 | 64 | 79.5% |
| Low | 22 | 40 | 49 | 11% |

4.2 Types of Writing anxiety

SLWAI results indicated that mean of cognitive anxiety (CA) is 17.89, somatic anxiety (SA) is 17.02, and avoidance of Behaviour (AB) is 19.58. The Avoidance of behavior is discovered as the highest type of writing anxiety experienced by ESL students. Table 2 shows the results of participants writing anxiety types.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Types of Writing Anxiety

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Total score |
|--------------------|-----|---------|---------|---------|-------------|
| CA | 200 | 10.00 | 28.00 | 17.8900 | 3578 |
| SA | 200 | 10.00 | 25.00 | 17.0200 | 3404 |
| AB | 200 | 11.00 | 28.00 | 19.5850 | 3917 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 200 | | | | |

4.3 Sources of Writing anxiety

To figure out the sources of writing anxiety in ESL undergrad students the researcher adopted CWAI by Rezaeia and Jafari, (2014a). According to the results of CWAI, the main sources of writing anxiety in participants are; fear of writing tests (11.76%), problems with the topic (10.92%), and low confidence in English (10.88%). The results of CWAI are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Results of CWAI

| No | Sources of Writing Anxiety | Total | Percentage |
|--------------|---|-------------|-------------|
| 1. | Fear of writing tests. | 566 | 11.67% |
| 2. | Problems with topic | 530 | 10.92% |
| 3. | low-confidence in English writing. | 528 | 10.88% |
| 4. | pressure to offer a perfect work | 482 | 9.93% |
| 5. | Teachers Negative Comments Feedback | 472 | 9.73% |
| 6. | writing under time constraints. | 462 | 9.52% |
| 7. | <i>High frequency of writing assignments.</i> | 462 | 9.52% |
| 8. | Insufficient Writing techniques | 462 | 9.52% |
| 9. | Lack of writing practice | 454 | 9.36% |
| 10. | Linguistics problems | 434 | 8.94% |
| Total | | 4582 | 100% |

5. Discussion

5.1 Level of Writing anxiety

According to the findings of the study 9.5% of participants experienced a high level of writing anxiety, 79.5% of participants had a moderate level of writing anxiety, and 11% of the participants had a low level of writing anxiety. So, it is concluded that most of the ESL undergrad students experienced a moderate level of writing anxiety. Al Jafen (2013) stated that a moderate level of writing anxiety is considered as an acceptable level writing anxiety, he also concluded that this extent of writing anxiety is a normal response of the learners that tends to lead them to become better writers in the future.

5.2 Types of Writing anxiety

The study further explored that Avoidance behavior is the leading type of writing anxiety faced by ESL undergrad Pakistani students. The mean score of avoidance anxiety is 19.58 The second common type of writing anxiety experienced by the students is cognitive anxiety with a mean score of 17.89 and somatic anxiety becomes the least experienced type of writing anxiety experienced by ESL undergraduate students with a mean score of 17.02. The students engage in avoidance of behavior when they are not interested in learning writing and they are unable to follow the procedures to make each paragraph, this is because students are unable to formulate proper paragraphs that can be turned into essays. Avoidance Behaviour is a kind of anxiety in which students avoid writing. This kind of anxiety experience is characterized as the behavioral aspect of anxiety. For instance, students who neglect writing class or are unwilling to accomplish the writing task is the most damaging form of writing anxiety because students will detest writing, they will be apprehensive to attend the writing class, consequently, they will not be able to achieve the maximum outcome in their course.

Cognitive anxiety is found to be the second dominant type of writing anxiety experienced by ESL undergraduate students with a mean score of 17.02. According to Wren and Rahmat (2021), cognitive anxiety is a mental component of an anxiety situation, in which learners are preoccupied with negative thoughts about their performance and being concerned about other peoples' views about their written work. El Shimi (2017) and Wern and Rahmat (2021) discovered that cognitive anxiety is the highest type of writing anxiety.

The least common type of writing anxiety is somatic anxiety with a mean score of 17.02 somatic anxiety is classified as physical symptoms that arise due to writing experience, which enhance the state of anxiety feelings and tension. Wern and Rahmat (2021). The features of somatic anxiety are: "heart goes pounding under time constraint English composition writing", "whole-body is stiff and tight when writing English essays", "mind goes blank when writing English essay writing"

5.3 Sources of Writing Anxiety

According to Krashen (1982), anxiety is an affective variable that has a significant effect on second language performance. There are several factors that cause students to feel nervous while writing in English and can also cause writing in English a complicated

task for them, these factors are found to be a serious impediment to students for improving their writing tasks. This research study discovered that sources of writing anxiety among ESL undergrad Pakistani students are: fear of writing tests (11.67%), problems with the topic (10.92%), low confidence in English writing (10.88%), pressure to offer perfect work (9.93%), fear of teacher's negative comments and evaluation (9.73%), working under time constraints (9.52%).

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the current study, it is concluded that ESL undergrad Pakistani students experienced a moderate level of writing anxiety, and Avoidance behavior was the leading type of anxiety. Moreover, this research study discovered that the main sources of writing anxiety in ESL undergraduate students were; fear of writing tests, problems with the topic, low confidence in English writing, pressure to offer perfect work. So, language teachers should be conscious of the presence of writing anxiety among students and they should implement appropriate teaching approaches in language classrooms to create an effective and anxiety-free learning environment.

7. Pedagogical Implications

1. Students' language skills like vocabulary, grammar, and written composition can be improved by teaching and practicing reading and writing skills simultaneously.
2. Designing appropriate assessment measures and new techniques assisting L2 learners to overcome their writing anxiety will not only help them to feel less anxious but also improve the quality of their written work and enhance their self-confidence.
3. To make learners more comfortable while writing instructor should allow them to complete their written work at home or the learners can create their written work in groups before they do a graded written task.
4. It is essential for writing instructors to develop a pleasant and less fearful environment of the writing class. Writing instructors can use relaxation exercises, assign obtainable writing goals and they can provide encouraging guidance to support students in developing their self-confidence in writing in English.
5. Writing instructors should change their students' negative perceptions of making errors because it motivates learners to encounter their mistakes with a positive learning attitude.
6. To help students to overcome their English language writing difficulty writing instructors should introduce students to good reading materials for enhancing their vocabulary knowledge and make them understand how to develop a variety of sentences in English.

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