

## **Exploring the Causes of Writing Anxiety: A Case of B.S. English Students**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the causes of writing anxiety found among the students of B.S. English. The data were collected through a questionnaire based on three point rating scale. The questionnaire was designed after reading a lot of literature on the topic concerned. The purpose of devising this questionnaire was to investigate the Writing Anxiety among B.S. English Students. The questionnaire consisted of ten questions. The results of the data collected through sixty respondents are shown through the graphs. In the end, it was concluded that the fear of teacher's negative comments, linguistic difficulties, pressure of time and perfect work, insufficient writing practice and problems with topic affect a lot while writing in English.

**Keywords:** Fear of teacher's negative comments, Linguistic difficulties, insufficient writing practice, problems with topic choice and pressure of time.

### **1. Introduction**

Of the four language skills, writing has always been the main concern of EFL practitioners and researchers (June, 2008). The usual justification for this is that the ability to write in English is considered vital to equip learners for success in college and their future careers (Tuan, 2010). In addition, the writing process contributes to the development of learners cognitive skills in attaining the required strategies in the learning process such as analysis, synthesis, inference, etc. (Bacha, 2002). However, most of Iranian EFL students have been found to have an inadequate competence in L2 writing (Jafari & Ansari, 2012; Dastjerdi & Samian, 2011; Zaree & Farvardin, 2009).

The failure of Iranian EFL students in L2 writing as effectively as they should, can perhaps be attributed to a variety of factors including L2 writing instruction, lack of motivation, L2 writing feedback, lack of target language proficiency and vocabulary, the interference of L1 into L2 and psychological variables such as anxiety which is the focus of this study. Many language educators and researchers believe that anxiety can be considered as one of the major predictors of academic performance (e.g. McCraty, 2007, as cited in Sioson, 2011). In this regard, Tanveer (2007, p. 1) states that “Students’ feeling of stress, anxiety and nervousness may impede their language learning and performance abilities”.

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986, as cited in Trang, et al., 2012 ) conceptualize foreign language anxiety as a specific type of anxiety and define it as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning process” (p.128). Research studies with L1 writers show that language writing anxiety has an adverse effect on their writing outcome (Daly & Miller; 1975; Daly & Shamo, 1975; Bloom, 1980; Leki, 1990; Matthews, 2001). Therefore, an implication would be that the writing performance of EFL learners might be affected by levels of anxiety. However, since much research in this area has

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been done on L1 writing anxiety and research studies on L2 writing anxiety is dearth, further research on L2 writing anxiety is necessary in order to understand its nature and its detrimental effects on students' writing performance.

With respect to the Iranian EFL context, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no published research has investigated L2 writing anxiety of Iranian EFL students. Furthermore, most studies that have been carried out regarding second language writing in EFL contexts have adopted a quantitative approach. The present study aims at filling this methodological gap by adopting mixed methods. According to Mertens (2005 as cited in Dörnyei, 2007) mixed methods have particular value when the researcher wants to examine an issue that is embedded in a complex or social context.

To summarize, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Are the students of B.S. English feel fear of teacher's negative comments while writing in English?
2. Are the students of B.S. English have less-confidence while writing in English?
3. Are the students of B.S. English feel linguistic difficulties while writing in English?

### **Hypotheses**

1. The students of B.S. English feel fear of teacher's negative comments while writing in English.
2. The students of B.S. English have less confidence while writing in English.
3. The students of B.S. English feel linguistic difficulties while writing in English.

## **2. Literature Review**

Cheng (2004a) investigated the sources of L2 writing among Chinese EFL learners. Using an open-ended questionnaire and an in-depth interview, the author found that L2 writers' anxiety is probably caused by a variety of reasons such as (1) instructional practices, (2) personal beliefs about writing and learning to write, (3) self-perceptions, and (4) interpersonal threats. Latif (2007) aimed to examine second language writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy in the context of English as a foreign language in Egypt. Participants were 67 Egyptian students of English language. The results indicated that second language anxiety was negatively associated with the students' writing performance.

In another study, Erkan and Saban (2011) attempted to identify whether writing performance in EFL students is related to writing anxiety, self-efficacy in writing, and/or attitudes towards writing. Participants were 188 university students, whose mother tongue was Turkish. They found that writing anxiety and writing performance are negatively correlated. In addition, the relation between writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy is negative. In his investigation conducted in order to explore the sources of writing anxiety in 57 Egyptian university students of English, Latif (2012) adapted the English Writing Apprehension Scale (EWAS), consisting of 12 items, each with five Likert-type responses (from 1 "strongly agree" to 5 "strongly disagree").

Responses to EWAS questionnaire and in interviews revealed that there six sources of the students' English writing apprehension: linguistic knowledge level, perceived language competence, writing performance level, perceived writing competence, instructional practices and fear of criticism. Kara (2013), in an investigation about writing anxiety involving 150 Turkish university students of English, used a 20-item writing anxiety scale. The results

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Muhammad Younas, Ahmad Subhani, Sumrah Arshad, Hafsa Akram, Muntaha Sohail, Maryiam Hamid and Maria Farzeen

Exploring the Causes of Writing Anxiety: A Case of B.S. English Students

200

demonstrated that have high levels of writing anxiety while writing a composition. Susoy and Tanyer (2013) studied the L2 writing anxiety levels of Turkish pre-service teachers of EFL and the relationship between their writing anxiety and writing performance.

The findings showed that the relation between writing anxiety and writing performance is significantly negative. Based on the findings, 19% of the participants are found to be high anxious while 21% are labeled to be low anxious and the rest (60%) are categorized as moderate anxious. Aljafran (2013) tried to identify whether Saudi EFL students experience anxiety in their academic writing in the science colleges and where these problems come from. The results revealed that participants share the same moderate feeling of English writing anxiety. Furthermore, the analysis of the open-ended questionnaire uncovered the sources of writing anxiety such as the weakness of students' past English education, lack of confidence in writing and inappropriate evaluation.

### **3. Research Methodology**

From the population of BS English students at UOS M.B. Din Pakistan, the sample of sixty students was selected through convenience sampling that involves the sample being drawn from that part of the population which is close to hand and it includes people who are easy to reach. The data were collected through a questionnaire based on three-point rating scale. The Questionnaire was designed after reading a lot of literature on the topic concerned.

The purpose and aim of devising this questionnaire was to explore the Causes of Writing Anxiety confronted by B.S. English students at UOS, M.B. Din Pakistan. The questionnaire consisted of only ten items because the nature of questions was comprehensive enough to serve the purpose. The data were collected from the BS students of University of Sargodha (M.B.DIN

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Muhammad Younas, Ahmad Subhani, Sumrah Arshad, HafsaAkram, Muntaha Sohail, Maryiam Hamid and Maria Farzeen

Exploring the Causes of Writing Anxiety: A Case of B.S. English Students

Campus). The results of this study are only generalizable to this specific population. The results of the data collected through sixty questionnaires are shown through the graphs.

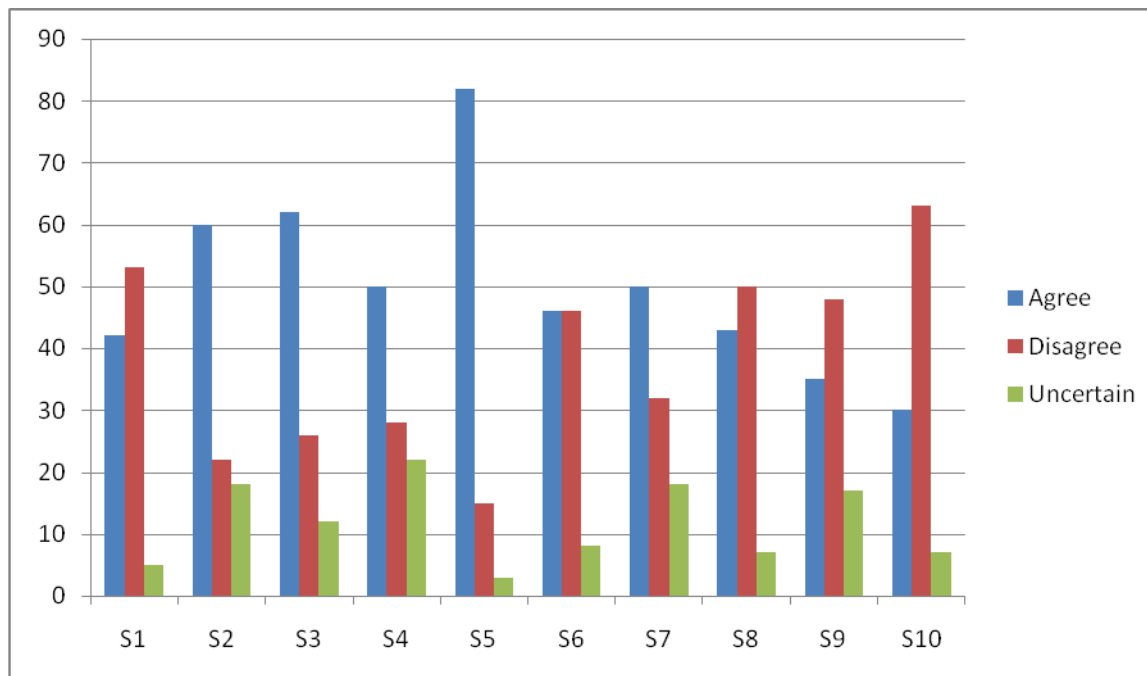
#### 4. Results and Discussions

**Table 4.1**

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Agree %</b>	<b>Disagree%</b>	<b>Uncertain%</b>
S.1 While writing in English, I feel fear of teacher's negative comments.	<b>42</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>05</b>
S.2 While writing in English, I have anxiety due to insufficient writing practice.	<b>60</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>18</b>
S.3 While writing in English, I have anxiety due to insufficient writing techniques.	<b>62</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>12</b>
S.4 While writing in English, I feel anxiety due to problem with topic.	<b>50</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>22</b>
S.5 While writing in English, I feel anxiety due to linguistic difficulties.	<b>82</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>03</b>
S.6 While writing in English, I feel anxiety due to the pressure of work to be done perfectly.	<b>46</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>08</b>
S.7 While writing in English, I feel anxiety due to time pressure.	<b>50</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>18</b>
S.8 While writing in English, I feel anxiety due to less confidence.	<b>43</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>07</b>
S.9 While writing in English, I feel anxiety due to the	<b>35</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>17</b>

writing test.			
S.10 While writing in English, I feel anxiety due to high frequency of writing assignments.	<b>30</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>07</b>

**Table 4.2**



As far as the first statement of questionnaire is concerned, it is disagreed by 53% of the respondents that the fear of teacher’s negative comments is a cause of anxiety while writing in English. Assumption can be made that fear of teacher’s negative comments is not found in B.S English students.

As far as second statement is concerned, it is agreed by 60% of the respondents that insufficient writing practice is a cause of anxiety while writing in English. Results indicate that insufficient writing practice is found in B.S. English students. Level of insufficient practice is high.

Third statement is agreed by 62% of the respondents that insufficient writing techniques are a cause of anxiety while writing in English. Assumption can be made that the problem of insufficient writing techniques is found in B.S English students to noticeable extent.

50% of the respondents agreed to the fourth statement that problems with topic are a cause of anxiety while writing in English. Assumption can be made that the anxiety due to problems with topic is found in half of B.S. English students.

The fifth item of the questionnaire is strongly agreed by 82% of the respondents that linguistic difficulties are a cause of anxiety while writing in English. Results indicate that linguistic difficulties are the greatest cause of writing anxiety in B.S. English students so far so the perception and opinion of students is concerned.

For statement no. six 46% of the respondents agreed that 46% of the respondents from that pressure of perfect are a cause of anxiety while writing in English.

So far as the seventh statement is concerned, 50% of the respondents show agreement that time pressure are a cause of anxiety while writing in English. It can be assumed that pressure of time effects while writing in English.

Eighth statement is disagreed by 50% of the respondents that less-confidence is a cause of anxiety while writing in English. Results indicate that less-confidence is not found in students.

The ninth statement is disagreed by 48% of the respondents that the fear of writing test is a cause of anxiety while writing in English. Assumption can be made that the fear of writing test is not found in B.S English students.



The tenth statement is disagreed by 63% of the respondents that high frequency of writing assignments is a cause of anxiety while writing in English. Results indicate that high frequency of writing assignments is not a cause of writing anxiety in students.

## 5. Conclusions and Implications

The findings show that writing anxiety is found at high level among B.S. English students. Fear of teacher's negative feedback, low self-confidence in writing and poor linguistic knowledge were reported as the main causes of second language writing anxiety. The pedagogical implications of this study are as under:

- Writing anxiety can be decreased among B.S. English students through appreciation of the students by the teachers and finishing the fear of writing tests.
- Sufficient writing practice and awareness of writing techniques can decrease the level of writing anxiety among B.S. English students.
- Writing anxiety can be minimized by solving B.S. English students' linguistic difficulties and increasing their self-confidence.
- Abundance of writing assignments should be avoided so that the students may feel relaxed to complete writing tasks.
- The teachers should guide the students to minimize their writing errors. Through positive reinforcement, writing anxiety can be lowered and gradual improvement in learners' writing can be ensured.

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