

A Study on Students' Writing Anxiety of English Study Program at FKIP UNRI

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine the levels, types, and causes of writing anxiety among third-year students in the English Study Program at FKIP Universitas Riau. A descriptive quantitative approach was employed in this study, utilizing a sample of 72 sixth-semester students chosen through cluster random sampling. The data were gathered through a questionnaire adapted from Cheng's Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) (2004) and the Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory (CWA) created by Rezaei and Jafari (2014). The findings reveal that 37.5% of the students experienced high writing anxiety, 36.1% experienced moderate anxiety, and 26.4% experienced low anxiety. In terms of anxiety type, cognitive anxiety was the most dominant, followed by avoidance behavior and somatic anxiety. Additionally, the research identified linguistic difficulties as the primary cause of writing anxiety, accounting for 16.42%. This suggests that limited vocabulary, sentence structure issues, and grammar mastery are significant barriers for EFL students in academic writing tasks.

Keywords: EFL Students; Writing Anxiety

INTRODUCTION

In the realm of education, literacy is one of the central pillars consisting of reading and writing. According to Barton (2017), literacy is closely linked to social and cultural contexts, wherein reading and writing serve as tools for communication and learning. However, writing is seen as a cognitive language activity that requires more complex understanding and critical thinking, allowing concepts to be organized and thoughts to be expressed more clearly (Jennifer & Ponniah, 2017). Consequently, writing holds a major role in the development of literacy, particularly for students in higher education who must master this skill to succeed in their studies. Writing anxiety is a common issue among EFL students and can negatively affect their academic performance (Aloairdhi, 2019). Cheng (2004) categorized writing anxiety into cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior. Students experiencing cognitive anxiety may fear negative evaluation or feel self-doubt. Somatic anxiety appears through physical symptoms such as nervousness and increased heart rate, while avoidance behavior is shown by students avoiding writing tasks altogether. In addition, Rezaei & Jafari (2014) identified the causes of writing anxiety to include linguistic difficulties, time pressure, and fear of evaluation. In the Indonesian context, writing anxiety is prevalent among university students, including those enrolled in English Education programs. Several recent studies have investigated writing anxiety across various educational levels and learning contexts. Sulfiana et al. (2021) found that Indonesian EFL students in online learning environments commonly experienced avoidance behavior as a dominant form of writing anxiety. Prasetyaningrum et al. (2021) also identified avoidance and cognitive anxiety as prevalent types among university students, linking them to factors such as frequent assignments, low confidence, and topic difficulty. Meanwhile, Jawas (2019) and Aloairdhi (2019) explored cultural and instructional

contributors to anxiety, such as perfectionism, insufficient writing techniques, and fear of feedback.

Although these studies have provided significant insight, there is a noticeable gap in the literature focusing specifically on third-year EFL students at the university level who are expected to demonstrate advanced academic writing skills. Most previous research has concentrated on early-semester students, online learning environments, or general causes of anxiety without examining its types and levels about writing experience and curriculum progression. The researcher conducted preliminary research by interviewing several third-year English Study Program students at Universitas Riau who have undergone several writing courses. Despite their academic experience, many students still reported feeling anxious about writing in English. Some expressed fear of making mistakes, difficulties in organizing ideas, and concerns about grammar and vocabulary. On the other hand, there is a student who has confidence in their writing. However, some students feel caught between being excited and still afraid of using grammar. To fill this gap, the current study explores the types, levels, and causes of writing anxiety experienced by third-year English Study Program students at Universitas Riau, supported by related studies and preliminary research. It is interesting for the researcher to discover the writing anxiety experienced by students in the English study program. The purpose of this research is to reveal the level, type, and causes of writing anxiety faced by the third-year students of the English study program at the Universitas Riau.

METHOD

This research utilized a descriptive quantitative approach. According to Creswell (2012), quantitative research involves collecting data in a structured way and analyzing it using statistical methods to explain or describe a phenomenon. The study was conducted with sixth-semester students from the English Study Program at FKIP UNRI. The total population consisted of 109 sixth-semester students across three classes. To select the participants, the researcher used cluster random sampling, which allowed for the random selection of whole groups rather than individuals. In the end, 72 students were chosen as the sample.

The instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire adapted from two validated instruments: the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) by Cheng (2004), which measures levels and types of writing anxiety, and the Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory (CWAI) by Rezaei & Jafari (2014), which identifies contributing factors. The completed tool included 29 questions based on a 5-point Likert scale. Validity and reliability tests were conducted before distribution to confirm that the instrument was appropriate for the study context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the results of the study, focusing on the levels, types, and causes of writing anxiety experienced by third-year students of the English Study Program at FKIP Universitas Riau.

The Level of Writing Anxiety Experienced by the Third-Year Students of English Study Program

Table 1. Levels of Students' Writing Anxiety

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low Anxiety	19	26.4%

Moderate Anxiety	26	36.1%
High Anxiety	27	37.5%
Total	72	100%

As shown in Table 1, 37.5% of students experienced high writing anxiety, while 36.1% reported moderate anxiety, and only 26.4% showed low anxiety. A significant majority of students (73.6%) reported moderate to high levels of anxiety when it comes to academic writing.

The Type of Writing Anxiety Experienced by the Third-Year Students of English Study Program

Table 2. Types of Students' Writing Anxiety

Type of Writing Anxiety	Frequency	Mean	Percentage (%)
Cognitive Anxiety	40	2.9757	55.6%
Somatic Anxiety	23	2.7937	31.9%
Avoidance Behavior	6	2.3254	8.3%
Equal/No Dominant Type	3	2.6983	4.2%

Table 2 shows that cognitive anxiety was the most dominant type, affecting more than half of the participants (55.6%). This type of anxiety involves internal negative thoughts, fear of making mistakes, and self-doubt. Somatic anxiety, experienced by 31.9% of students, involves physical symptoms like tension or nervousness during writing. A smaller proportion (8.3%) reported avoidance behavior, where students tend to delay or avoid writing tasks altogether. Lastly, 3 students (4.2%) were categorized under Equal/No Dominant Type, meaning their anxiety scores across the three types (cognitive, somatic, and avoidance) were nearly equal, with no single type standing out as dominant. These results indicate that Cognitive Anxiety is the most common form of writing anxiety among the students.

The Causes of Writing Anxiety Experienced by the Third-Year Students of English Study Program

Table 3. Causes of Students' Writing Anxiety

No	Causes of Writing Anxiety	Mean	Percentage
1	Linguistic difficulties	3.4861	16.42%
2	Insufficient writing practice	3.1528	14.85%
3	Insufficient writing technique	3.0694	14.45%
4	Fear of writing tests	2.7778	13.08%
5	Time pressure	3.1528	14.85%
6	High frequency of writing assignments	2.8889	13.60%
7	Topic difficulty	2.7083	12.75%
Total		21.2359	100%

Based on Table 3, the main cause of students' writing anxiety was linguistic difficulties (16.42%), followed by insufficient writing practice and time pressure, both at 14.85%. Other contributing factors included insufficient writing technique (14.45%), high frequency of writing assignments (13.60%), fear of writing tests (13.08%), and topic difficulty (12.75%). Students' anxiety mainly arises from language difficulties and academic pressures, particularly due to a lack of linguistic competence.

Discussion

This section presents an interpretation of the research findings, drawing connections between the data collected and previous studies reviewed in the literature.

The Level of Writing Anxiety Experienced by the Third-Year Students of English Study Program

The findings revealed that most third-year students of the English Study Program at FKIP Universitas Riau experienced moderate to high levels of writing anxiety, even though they were at an advanced stage in their academic journey. These results align with Sulfiana et al. (2021), who found that Indonesian EFL students experienced high anxiety during online writing, and with Prasetyaningrum et al. (2021), who noted moderate to high anxiety among second-semester students due to workload and low self-confidence. Internationally, similar patterns were found. Almutairy (2024) reported that Saudi students showed moderate to high anxiety related to low writing self-efficacy, while Kamal (2023) observed similar levels among students using Google Docs, with symptoms present in thoughts, physical reactions, and avoidance behavior. Aloairdhi (2019) also found moderate anxiety among Saudi female learners, influenced by fear of evaluation and grammar issues.

This study used Cheng's Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), which effectively measured students' anxiety across cognitive, somatic, and avoidance dimensions. Consistent with Cheng's findings, cognitive anxiety was the most dominant in this group, indicating fear of judgment and performance pressure. Yoon (2024), also found cognitive anxiety to be most prevalent among Korean EFL learners, further confirming the scale's cross-cultural relevance. Interestingly, despite having completed several writing courses, many third-year students still struggled with writing anxiety, especially in evaluative situations. This supports Puspitasari et al. (2024), who found that even experienced learners can feel overwhelmed due to vocabulary limitations, grammar issues, and fear of failure. Overall, the results emphasize that writing anxiety persists regardless of academic level, and overcoming it requires not just writing practice but also targeted feedback and emotional support.

The Type of Writing Anxiety Experienced by the Third-Year Students of English Study Program

The findings revealed that cognitive anxiety was the most dominant type of writing anxiety experienced by third-year English study program students at FKIP Universitas Riau. This type of anxiety includes worry, negative self-expectations, and fear of being judged, especially in academic writing tasks. The result supports Cheng's (2004) definition of cognitive anxiety as mental distress caused by performance-related concerns. It is also in line with Yoon (2024), who found cognitive anxiety to be the most prevalent among Korean EFL learners, particularly in situations involving grammar concerns and misunderstandings.

Following cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety was the second most reported type. This form of anxiety is marked by physical symptoms such as nervousness, tension, or rapid heartbeat, especially under time pressure or in evaluative settings. The presence of somatic anxiety

confirms Cheng's (2004) claim that writing anxiety can also manifest physically, potentially disrupting students' focus and clarity. This result aligns with Putra et al. (2024), who observed stress-related behaviors during writing exams, and with Jawas (2019), who noted physical unease among students in timed writing tasks. Although not as common as cognitive anxiety, somatic symptoms still significantly interfere with the writing process. As Sulfiana et al. (2021) observed, stress and mental blocks often happen together. This means that physical and mental symptoms can make each other worse.

Avoidance behavior, the least common type of anxiety. Despite its lower frequency, this type is still important to address, as it involves actively avoiding writing tasks due to fear or discomfort. This contrasts with Prasetyaningrum et al. (2021), who found avoidance to be dominant among less experienced students, suggesting that writing experience may help reduce avoidance tendencies. Nonetheless, students who avoid writing risk missing opportunities to improve their skills. As noted by Talasee & Poopatwiboon (2024), even minimal avoidance can hinder writing development, especially if rooted in past negative feedback or persistent self-doubt. These findings support Cheng's categorization and align with broader research by Kamal (2023) and Almutairy (2024), which emphasized the emotional roots of writing anxiety. In summary, this study highlights that writing anxiety is both mental and physical, and even low-frequency types like avoidance deserve serious attention.

The Causes of Writing Anxiety Experienced by the Third-Year Students of English Study Program

The most dominant cause of writing anxiety among third-year English Study Program students at FKIP Universitas Riau was linguistic difficulties, which include challenges with grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. These language-related issues hinder students' ability to clearly express ideas and often lead to fear of making mistakes. This supports findings by Wahyuni & Umam (2017) and Jawas (2019), who identified linguistic difficulties as the top contributor to writing anxiety. The second most cited cause was insufficient writing practice, where students felt unprepared due to limited exposure to regular writing activities. This aligns with Putra et al. (2024) and Wahyuni & Umam (2017), who reported that a lack of practice can weaken students' confidence and fluency. Time pressure was another key factor that students felt rushed during timed exams or when facing tight deadlines, which increased anxiety and often led to underperformance. Kamal (2023) and Prasetyaningrum et al. (2021) also observed similar effects, noting that rushed writing often sacrifices quality and deepens students' fear of failure.

Other notable causes include insufficient writing technique and the high frequency of writing assignments. Many students struggled with organizing their thoughts and structuring their paragraphs, often feeling unsure of how to start or connect their ideas, an issue also identified by Wahyuni & Umam (2017). Frequent and overlapping writing tasks across courses created pressure and mental fatigue, echoing the findings of Prasetyaningrum et al. (2021) and Rezaei & Jafari (2014). Meanwhile, fear of writing tests and topic difficulty added further strain. High-stakes assessments triggered performance anxiety, while complex or unfamiliar topics led to mental blocks, as also observed in (Puspitasari et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study explored the writing anxiety experienced by third-year students of the English Study Program at FKIP Universitas Riau. The aim was to reveal the level, types, and causes of their writing anxiety using a combination of the SLWAI Cheng (2004) and CWAI Rezaei & Jafari (2014) frameworks. Based on the findings, this study concludes that most third-year English Study Program students at FKIP Universitas Riau experienced moderate to high levels of

writing anxiety, with cognitive anxiety being the most dominant type. The main causes were linguistic difficulties, followed by insufficient writing practice, writing technique issues, and time pressure.

These results offer valuable insights for educators teaching writing in English as a foreign language. By recognizing the emotional challenges students face, lecturers can offer more supportive and flexible learning environments. This might include giving encouraging feedback, offering more writing practice without pressure, and helping students build their confidence gradually. Creating a classroom atmosphere that reduces fear and encourages expression can make a big difference in how students approach writing.

In summary, writing anxiety is a real and impactful challenge for EFL learners. Supporting students both academically and emotionally can help them overcome anxiety and become more confident writers. This study provides insight that can guide future research and teaching strategies aimed at improving writing instruction for EFL students.

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