

WRITING ANXIETY EXPERIENCED BY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

This research was aiming at knowing the students' writing anxiety level, including cognitive, somatic, and avoidance behavior anxiety. It applied a quantitative approach a descriptive method. The sample was 55 eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Baubau selecting using a cluster random sampling technique. A SLWAI was utilized as the instrument of this research. The research found that the average score of cognitive anxiety was 3.11 which was in moderate level of anxiety, the mean score of somatic anxiety was 3.14 which was in moderate category, and the mean score of avoidance behavior was 3.04 which was in moderate category. Therefore, the lowest level of writing anxiety was the avoidance behavior, while the highest level of writing anxiety was somatic anxiety.

Keywords: *Writing, Cognitive Anxiety, Somatic Anxiety, Avoidance Behavior*

Introduction

The use of the English language plays an essential part in the field of education (Ali et al., 2022). In learning English, writing is one of the most essential abilities. For students, writing is a must skill to learn. Because when students learn English, the student must know how to write their ideas in English. In academics, writing is used to communicate ideas instead of speaking. Writing the idea makes them more observable and makes them last longer.

Writing, as stated by Nation (2009), is something that can be done instead of practicing other abilities like reading, speaking, and listening. When learning writing, the students need to know how to arrange the sentence as coherently as possible. According to Salem (2008), writing helps students' vocabulary, idioms, and grammatical structures. Writing also encourages students to use language in

creatively. It gives students the challenging opportunity to delve deeper than what they have been taught to communicate. Although it's crucial, learning how to write well is often perceived as difficult. Therefore, many students feel burdened when writing something in English. According to Younas *et al.* (2014), psychological characteristics, a lack of vocabulary and linguistic skill in the target language, and a lack of motivation are some of the factors that make writing difficult.

It is important for students to be aware that the texts they write can do things they can complain, give information and etc. (Martínez-Lirola, 2015). When students want to write something, they need a lot of information or ideas, and they have to think in their minds so they can express them in sentences and essays. Therefore, nowadays almost everyone is required to be able to write English, but in reality, many people are less motivated to learn English. Besides, students may find it challenging to improve their English writing skills due to concerns about being judged negatively and the pressures of writing within a set amount of time. Such an occurrence, if it exists in the actual world, suggests that pupils suffer from writing anxiety (Wahyuni & Umam, 2017).

Anxiety is a natural emotion that influences how well students learn (Miri & Joia, 2018). It means that the success of students in learning, especially English or its specific skills, is affected by the anxiety they feel both their language anxiety or their anxiety in certain skill of English, such as reading anxiety or writing anxiety since experts have developed the inventory to determine the language anxiety or the English skill anxiety. In addition, Ormrod (2011), who defines anxiety as a sensation of uneasiness and concern about situation in which the outcome is unknown.

Anxiety related to writing has been identified as a key barrier for the majority of Indonesian EFL students (Yanti & Hidayati, 2021). Writing anxiety is a feeling of fear or phobia faced by an individual in the process of writing. Writing anxiety, according to Senko (2016), is a significant issue that can impede writing skills and lead to low achievement. He went on to say that writing anxiety is linked to other factors such as students' attitudes toward writing skills and, ultimately their motivation to write. Liu and Ni (2015) add that writing anxiety harms students' behaviour when writing in a

foreign language. The impacts of writing anxiety are likely to erode students' talent and self-assurance in their ability to write well.

Cheng (2004) divides writing anxiety into three types: cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior. The term "cognitive anxiety" describes the mental component of an anxious state, which might include things like worrying about meeting others' expectations, being obsessed with how well you're doing, and having a hard time relaxing. The expectations of their peers and teachers can have a significant impact on the final product that a class of pupils produces. Somatic anxiety is the felt physical manifestations of an anxious state, such as jitters or muscle tension. When students are under pressure from a tight deadline and are struggling to come up with a concept, they can experience anxiety and stress. Students with avoidance anxiety tend to put off writing assignments. Here we are talking about the ways in which anxiety manifests in a person's actions. The students, for example, are not putting in the necessary effort to complete their writing assignments or even showing up to writing class.

Studies in the field of language instruction have demonstrated the crippling impact of students' writing worries on their academic performance. Hassan (2001) found, through the use of both a quality and quantity writing challenge, that students with lower levels of anxiety wrote more engaging and well-developed pieces than their more nervous peers. Higher-anxiety authors, according to Cheng (2002) choose non-writing majors rather than writing programs. Therefore, this research is addressed to find out the level of each type of writing anxiety, including the overall writing anxiety. It is expected to inform the English teacher about the students' level of writing anxiety, so that the teacher may reduce it with various learning method or technique during English class, especially in learning writing skill. Therefore, writing must be dealing with the ductions in order to have natural English writing in the classroom activities (Sardi et al., 2017)

Method

This research applied a quantitative approach of descriptive design. It meant the data obtained was descriptively explained relating to students' writing anxiety. The population of the research was the eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Baubau which consisted of eleven classes. A cluster sampling technique was used to select the sample of this research. It was implemented by selecting two classes out of eleven groups in which all of the students in those classes participated as the research sample; there were a total of 55 students involved.

The research instrument utilized a questionnaire of Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) developed by Cheng (2004) consisting of 22 items. It included 8 items of cognitive anxiety (1,3,7,9,14,17,20,21), 7 items of somatic anxiety (2,6,8,11,13,15,19), and 7 items of avoidance behavior (4,5,10,12,16,18,22) with 5 optional answers of Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The data were analyzed using a descriptive statistics test of SPSS version 25.0 to obtain the score of mean, median, mode, and standard deviation. The mean score acquired is then consulted to the following range adopted from Suriansih (2020) to determine the level or criteria of each type of the writing anxiety as presented in the table below:

Table 1. Mean range of anxiety level

No.	Mean Range	Level
1.	1.0 – 1.8	Very Low
2.	1.9 – 2.6	Low
3.	2.7 – 3.4	Moderate
4.	3.5 – 4.2	High
5.	4.3 – 5.0	Very High

Results

1. Description of Cognitive Anxiety

This type of writing anxiety was taken from 8 items of SLWAI. The data analysis indicated that the mean score of the cognitive anxiety was 3.11 with the standard deviation was 0.57. Based on the table of the mean range of anxiety level, it was known that this type of anxiety was in moderate level. In addition, the average score dan the level of anxiety of each item were presented in the table below.

Table 2. Descriptive Data of Cognitive Anxiety

No.	Statement	Mean	Level
1.	I am not nervous at all when writing sentences in English	2.42	Low
3.	I feel worried and anxious if I know my writing will be judged when writing English sentences.	3.35	Moderate
7.	I am not worried that my English sentences are much worse than others.	3.00	Moderate
9.	If my English sentences are graded, I will worry about getting a low grade.	3.87	High
14.	I am worried that other students will ridicule my English sentences if they read them.	3.25	Moderate
17.	I am not worried at all about what other people think about my English sentences	2.69	Low
20.	I am afraid that my English sentence will be chosen as an example to be discussed in class.	3.27	Moderate
21.	I am not afraid at all if my English sentences are judged not good.	3.05	Moderate

From the table above, it can be recognized that 2 statements were in low level, 5 statements were in moderate level, and 1 statement was in high level. The lowest score of anxiety was in statement 1 with the mean score was 2.42 in which when writing English sentences, the students have no anxiety at all. On the other hand, the highest score of anxiety was addressed to statement 9 with the mean score was 3.87 in which the students will be anxious about receiving a poor grade if their English sentences are evaluated.

2. Description of Somatic Anxiety

This type of writing anxiety was taken from 7 items of SLWAI. The data analysis indicated that the mean score of the somatic anxiety was 3.14 with the standard deviation was 0.70. Based on the table of the mean range of anxiety level, it was known that this type of anxiety was in moderate level. In addition, the average score dan the level of anxiety of each item were presented in the table below.

Table 3. Descriptive Data of Somatic Anxiety

No.	Statement	Mean	Level
2.	I feel my heart pounding when I write a sentence in English with a time limit.	3.44	Moderate
6.	My mind is often blank when I start working on English sentences.	3.31	Moderate
8.	I tremble or sweat when I write English sentences with time pressure.	2.98	Moderate
11.	My mind gets muddled when I write English sentences under the time limit.	3.24	Moderate
13.	I often feel panicky when I write English sentences with a time limit.	3.27	Moderate
15.	I felt stiff when suddenly asked to write a sentence in English.	3.20	Moderate
19.	I usually feel my whole body stiff and tense when I write English sentences.	2.53	Low

The table above indicated that 1 statement was in low level, and 6 statements were in moderate level. The lowest score was in statement 19 with the mean score was 2.53 in which in attempting to write a phrase in English, the students feel as though every muscle in their bodies were tense and rigid. In addition, the highest score was in statement 2 in which while writing an English sentence with a strict deadline, the students' hearts start to rush.

3. Description of Avoidance Behavior

This type of writing anxiety was taken from 7 items of SLWAI. The data analysis indicated that the mean score of the avoidance behavior was 3.04 with the standard deviation was 0.59. Based on the table of the mean range of anxiety level, it was known that this type of anxiety was in moderate level. In addition, the average score dan the level of anxiety of each item were presented in the table below.

Table 4. Descriptive Data of Avoidance Behavior

No.	Statement	Mean	Level
4.	I often choose to write down my thoughts in English.	3.09	Moderate
5.	I usually do my best to avoid writing sentences in English.	2.84	Moderate
10.	I do my best to avoid situations where I have to write in English	3.05	Moderate
12.	I would not use English to write sentences unless I had no choice.	3.11	Moderate
16.	I will do my best to make excuses if asked to write English sentences.	3.04	Moderate
18.	I usually look for every opportunity to write English sentences outside of class.	3.29	Moderate
22.	If possible, I will use English to write a sentence.	2.85	Moderate

The table above indicated that all 7 statements were in moderate level. However, the average scores were different for each item. Statement 5, in which students are asked to write a complete phrase in English, received the lowest mean score (2.84). Statement 18 also had the highest mean score (3.29), indicating that students actively seek out opportunities outside of class to produce English sentences.

Discussion

Based on the data discussed in the previous discussion above, it is found that the mean score of cognitive anxiety is 3.11 which is in moderate level of anxiety, the mean score of somatic anxiety is 3.14 which is in moderate category, and the mean score of avoidance behavior is 3.04 which is in moderate category. Those results indicate that in all types of writing anxiety, the students experience moderate level of anxiety. Furthermore, it reveals that the lowest anxiety the students feel is the avoidance behavior and the highest anxiety is the somatic anxiety.

In this research, the avoidance behavior the students feel the most is the students often look for any opportunity they can get to practice writing sentences in English outside of school. BP *et al.* (2022) define that avoidance behavior is sort of anxiety where the students evade writing. This is often behavior angles of the anxiety experience. In the side of somatic anxiety, the students experience the most is when

the students have to compose a sentence in English within a certain amount of time, they can feel their hearts racing. The feeling the students experience related to what Parnabas *et al.* (2013) explain that somatic anxiety is related to autonomic arousal and physical symptoms like feeling nervous, having high blood pressure, a dry throat, tight muscles, a fast heart rate, excessive sweating, and butterflies in the stomach. It is supported by the research of Arindra & Ardi (2020) which find that the majority of the kids noticed that their hearts were beating quicker. They start to shake, become blank, sense terror, freeze up, and feel stiff all at the same time. When they are unable to double-check their work, this bodily anxiety becomes significantly worse. They are just concerned with completing their essay within the allotted amount of time.

Several factors can cause writing anxiety. Rohmah & Muslim (2020) emphasize that anxiety is mostly caused by individuals' pessimistic attitudes on the challenging nature of academic writing as a task. The absence of English writing habits on their part, as well as their ignorance of the observance of and adherence to grammatical norms in their works, gave rise to these perceptions. Because of this, individuals experience anxiety whenever they are presented with academic writing duties, which leads to a developing fear of receiving unfavorable assessments. As a consequence of this, students who had higher levels of anxiety performed badly, and their anxiety had a tendency to be incapacitating, which disrupted the writing process for these students. Zhang (2011) adds other factors causing students anxiety, such as language problems, not enough writing practice, fear of getting a bad grade from writing teachers, lack of topic knowledge, and low self-confidence in their writing skills.. Experiencing moderate or high anxiety does not mean the writing performance is low. As Jawas (2019) argues that writing anxiety, whether mild or severe, is not a symptom of insufficient writing ability; rather, it is a condition that emerges throughout the writing process and, if properly addressed, can be remedied.

Conclusion

This study reveals that cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior have moderate level of anxiety. Among all of them, avoidance behavior is the lowest anxiety experienced by the students with the mean score is 3.04. While

somatic anxiety is the highest anxiety the students experience with the mean score is 3.14. Kusumaningputri *et al.* (2018) have provided several tactics for teachers to implement in the classroom in order to assist in reducing the anxiety that students experience when writing. They are providing feedback during the writing process that focuses on coherence manner, rather than looking at the students' mistakes in grammar; training them to write on time by providing sufficient instruction and prompt vocabulary or topics; modeling a good writing product to acquaint them with writing techniques; and giving feedback during the writing process that focuses on coherence manner. In addition, Yanti & Hidayati (2021) also find that the anxiety that children feel when writing is significantly impacted by their teachers. Therefore, it is recommended that instructors refrain from providing unfavorable feedback, redirecting comments to focus on the writing process rather than the errors that were made in the final output, and cultivating a less stressful learning environment. In addition, the teacher can use a technology-aid material in teaching English, since Noviasmy *et al.* (2023) argue that several technologically-enabled advancements in teaching and learning have been launched and to develop the test as Faizal & Ali (2022) state that a test serves as one of the most essential components of the overall educational process. By the result and conclusion of this research, the researcher expect that the study related to anxiety in English or its certain skills is conducted more to provide the data to the school or teacher, so that the preventive steps can be done to reduce it as low as possible to gain the better students' achievement.

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