

# **GENDER-BASED DIFFERENCES IN LEVELS OF WRITING ANXIETY OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF ENGLISH STUDY PROGRAM**

**Hesti Wahyuni Anggraini**

*A lecturer at Language Center of Sriwijaya University, South Sumatra*

## **ABSTRACT**

Viewpoints toward writing as the most difficult skill to acquire in EFL setting provide myriad opportunities for students to experience writing anxiety. Also, gender roles in language learning utilize different expectations toward writing anxiety. The study aims at investigating whether there is significant difference in levels of writing anxiety on the basis of gender, 110 undergraduate students, 55 of each, and also what factor(s) are included. For the purposes of finding the significance, it was designed a ready-made 26-item questionnaire named FLCAS in Writing, using Likert-scale. The findings revealed that student's sex was not significant variable in levels of writing anxiety by the test of significance (2-tailed) of .362 ( $p > 0.05$ ) in independent sample t-test, with insignificant mean difference of 2.145. It reported that male students felt higher levels of writing anxiety than females. The test of factor analysis described factor affecting student's levels of writing anxiety was mostly on the light of evaluation apprehension, not either stress or product apprehension.

**Key words:** EFL, gender-based, writing anxiety

Written communication is the representation of ideas through the demonstration of cohesion and coherence thought. Thus, the viewpoints toward the need for mastery in written academic communication in language classroom activities has led the skill of writing as an increasingly important role for all English language learners. In the field of language teaching and learning, even though students are mostly commanded to write more, it is still hard to find students who to some extent can cope with writing difficulties. For this reason, writing has long been claimed as a very difficult skill to acquire and is dreaded by L2/FL students (Gupta, 1998). This case might be mainly caused by the fact that written text production is complex by nature and requires plenty of procedures (Hedge, 2000:7). In other words, the success in writing is associated with a high degree of organization, accuracy, the use of complex grammatical, self expression, flow of ideas, and confidence.

The unintentional perspectives toward literacy skills, especially in writing skill, have let Indonesian college students see writing as hazardous task to do. The result of a survey conducted by Alwasilah (2004) at UPI found out that 48% of 179 EFL students view writing as neglected subject to take due to the fact that writing class is time-consuming. Another finding that college students in South Sumatera still faced difficulties in writing has been conducted by Abdullah (2005:51), involving 40 students of English Study Program of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of University

of PGRI Palembang. The finding showed that plenty of writing procedures resulted on errors done by students, not only on the linguistic aspects, but also on the rhetorical aspects.

Also, based on writer's informal interview to some students of English Study Program of University of PGRI Palembang, some evidences were found toward students' writing. First, they said that most of them were lack of vocabulary and afraid of their grammar and being mistakes in English writing. The last was that the considerations in some conditions, such as writing for evaluation and writing in unexpected instruction. All these empirical data imply that lecturers of English are required to boost up such kind of great efforts to improve students' writing skill.

Then, to see the position of English in Indonesia, it is extremely true that the difficulty of learning to write well also happens not only in native language, but also in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This is reflected in the idea by Hedge (1992:7) who clearly indicates that "the demands of information development, accuracy, and grammatical devices present particular problems for learners of English as a foreign language". It is assumed that they have ever felt experiences in which they are unable to express the ideas or feel discomfort during the process of writing.

Also, there are still many important differences building on writing in native language and writing in foreign language. Perhaps, writing has come into the psychological value for students as a form of support to learn (Byrne, 1993:6). It is also possible that students' experiences in writing as a mother tongue was frustrating. Here, learners might have never seen writing as a pleasure activity; as a result, they felt that they were poor writers as the consequence of being not motivated to write and coming into failure in writing at last.

Running through the above discussion, there are some focuses to discuss here. Again, Byrne (1993:4-5) explains why most of the students and teachers as well see writing as a difficult activity, both in mother tongue and in foreign language. Byrne (1993) identifies three causes of why writing is difficult to do: psychological, linguistic, and cognitive problems. In the notion of cognitive problems, writing task covers the obligation of mastering structures and written form of language, while in the side of linguistic perspective, it talks more on how to create such kind of coherence and cohesion. At last, to see the essence of writing in psychological problems (affective domain, Brown, 2007:153), the reason why writing is difficult is caused by writing as an individual activity in which there is no interaction and the benefit of feedback.

The fact that writing is seen as psychological activity of the language user to put information in the written text (Siahaan, 2008: 215) and the demands of language features (Hedge, 1992:7), all make foreign language students anxious to be involved in writing. Psychologically, it is claimed that there will be personality factor that might unlikely affect students' writing achievement, while linguistically, there are many language features to consider during the process of writing. In the eye of foreign

language learning, psychologically, one kind of affective factors in language learning comes across with the term “anxiety”; consequently, it is known as factor in academic performance (Brown, 2007:162). Anxiety is defined as “learners’ inability in communication, fear of negative social evaluation, and test anxiety” (Brown, 2007:162). That is to say, under the discussion of language, it is now known as language anxiety, in the focus of writing anxiety (Rose, 1985:7).

Studies done by previous researchers showed there was significant difference in writing achievement on the basis of writing anxiety. Students show their anxiety toward writing through nervousness and worry (Cheng, 2004:330) involving 421 freshmen English major who were taking writing course. The result of the study found that high expectations for writing influence more on increasing students’ anxiety. Obviously, the effect of feeling anxious significantly makes some differences toward students’ writing achievement. Also, for some students, feeling anxious toward writing job seriously decreases achievement because of lack of knowledge about written features, like lack of vocabulary and disability of cohesion and coherence as well. At last, this factor can affect students’ motivation to take writing course (Cheng, 2004:332).

Others also said that there would be role of gender. Gender in language use also plays important aspect to expose and even the least aspect to paid attention in language learning. Generally, gender is defined as “female” and “male”. Definition of gender given by UNESCO Bangkok (2005:4) refers to “the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes, and likely behaviors of both women and men (femininity and masculinity)”.

The result of the study found that there was significant difference between levels of writing anxiety on the basis of gender. It explained that female college students reported higher levels of writing anxiety than males (Martinez, 2011:356-357). Here, it implies that gender plays the role in writing anxiety. It is assumed that female students may be more anxious than men in mediating a balance between what has been settled during the classroom activities and their expectations toward the result of their writing. This claim is also supported by Cayton (1990:324-325). It was found that while the men most frequently wrote about their cognitive progress in analyzing issues, the women more often wrote about themselves and the affective processes involved. The result of this study can be argued that women experience more anxiety than men. The difficulty of balancing between writing skill and the demands of writing standard is leading women to higher anxiety. From this condition, it is assumed that female students would have higher anxiety than males during writing task.

Descriptive study is used to conduct this research in order to find out whether there is significant difference among levels of writing anxiety on the basis of gender or not. Utilizing two tasks during the research, a ready-made questionnaire specifically seeks out the factors affecting students’ level of writing anxiety and the significance level in levels of writing anxiety based on gender. Thus, this study intends to answer the

questions: (1) there is significant difference among levels of writing anxiety on the basis of gender, and (2) what factors affect levels of writing anxiety between female and male students.

## **METHOD AND PROCEDURES**

### **Research design**

Descriptive study was carried out during the research in order to see the trends in the real field toward whether there is significant difference on students' levels of writing anxiety on the basis of gender, in the number of 110 college students of University of PGRI Palembang of the sixth semester students of English Education Study Program who enrolled Writing 4 subject in academic year 2011/2012. The participants were chosen purposively because the writer cannot use all of the population in one hand regarding of unbalanced number of females and males students. The writer ensures that female and male students are included in the study in the same proportion, 55 students of each. In this study, the elements of the study would be (a) students who have high level of anxiety; (b) students who have medium level of anxiety, and (c) students who have low level of anxiety, between female and male students.

### **Procedures of data collection**

Here, the writer distributed a ready-made language anxiety questionnaire named Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale in Writing (FLCAS) written by Dally-Miller (1975) as an instrument for knowing students' levels of writing anxiety. The Dally-Miller test is taken from Journal of Research in the Teaching of English 12, 242-249, entitled "The Empirical Development of an Instrument to Measure Writing Apprehension. This uses Likert-scale with 5 grading for 26 items. FLCAS is asked to indicate student's evaluation apprehension (items no. 2, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, and 25), such as "I have no fear of my writing's being evaluated". Also, FLCAS is introduced to the student's stress apprehension stated in items no. 1, 3, 7, 10, 15, 21 and 26, like "I avoid writing".

The rests are concerned about students' writing product apprehension (items no. 6, 8, and 17) by saying "Handing in a composition makes me feel good". See Appendix 1 for clear description on. Last, to diagnose in whichever level of writing anxiety felt by students, it will be discussed in Appendix 2 Level of Writing Anxiety.

Before conducting the real study, at first, the writer conducted a try-out to see the validity and reliability of a ready-made language anxiety questionnaire named Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale in Writing (FLCAS) written by Dally-Miller (1975) as an instrument of the study. During the test of validity and reliability of the instrument, the writer used Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients that showed .846 of reliability coefficients. Then, to check the validity of each item, the result of try-out showed that  $t_{obtained} > t_{table} (.2546)$ . Those given data explained that the 26-item of questionnaire can be used as an instrument.

### Procedures for data analysis

To answer the questions of whether there is significant difference in levels of writing anxiety on the basis of gender, the writer would use independent samples t-test. Identifying in whichever levels of writing anxiety students are in, it refers to the formula by Dally-Miller (see Appendix 2).

### FINDINGS

Judging from the categories of writing anxiety on the number of students' levels of writing anxiety as whole (N=110 students, 55 female students and 55 male students as well), students mostly experienced medium level of writing anxiety in the number of 65 students, clearly stated around 59.1% of 110 students. Hierarchically, the description of students' levels of writing anxiety is as follows: 40% students (44 out of 110 students) felt low level of writing anxiety and only 1% (1 out of 110 students) felt high writing anxiety. (See Table 1)

Table 1. Number and Percent of EFL Students in Three Writing Anxiety Categories

Categories of Levels of Writing Anxiety	Male	Female	Total	Percent (%)
Low Anxiety	25	19	44	40%
Medium Anxiety	29	36	65	59.1%
High Anxiety	1	0	1	1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100%</b>

In detailed, students' levels of writing anxiety showed that mean of male students in levels of writing anxiety 94.11 while mean score of female students I levels of writing anxiety 91.96. Overall, mean difference toward students' levels of writing anxiety on the basis of gender was 2.145. This indicates that male students felt higher level of writing anxiety than males. (See Table 2)

Table 2. Gender-based Differences in Levels of Writing Anxiety

	Males		Females		Mean Difference (Gender)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
<b>Writing Anxiety</b>	94.11	14.519	91.96	9.572	2.145

Then, to determine whether there is significant difference in levels of writing anxiety, there would be 2 procedures. First, the test of Levenes' test analysis was done. Lastly, the analysis of t-test for equality of means of 2 samples; here it refers to male and female students. In the light of Levene's test, it showed that  $F_{obtained} > F_{table}$  or  $p > 0.05$  ( $p = .110 > p = .005$ ). This data resulted on the decision that there is no statistically significant difference in levels of writing anxiety on the basis of gender between means. Then, the test of t-test for equality of means,  $t_{table}$  in 95% confidence interval ( $\alpha = 5\%$ ) of  $df = n - 2$  ( $110 - 2 = 108$ ). Due to the fact that there was the test of 2-tailed significant

level, to interpret the  $t_{table}$  in the column of  $p=0.025$  ( $p=0.05/2$ ) showed that  $t_{table}(0.025; 108) = 1.9821$ . Also, it referred to probability  $p>0.05$  ( $.362>0.05$ ). The description of  $t_{obtained} < t_{table}$  ( $.915<1.9821$ ) reported that students' levels of writing anxiety made no statistically significant difference on the basis of gender. For full description, see Table 3.

Table 3. Summary Statistics of Gender Differences in Levels of Writing Anxiety

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)
<b>Writing Anxiety</b>	2.601	.110	.915	108	.363

As shown in Table 4, to investigate what factors affect students' levels of writing anxiety, factor 1 received high outcomes from the questionnaire items that are mostly related to evaluation apprehension. This factor was labeled as in Q11, Q12, Q14, Q19, and Q20, while stress apprehension and product apprehension only give contribution to the students' levels of writing anxiety. Factor 2 was also defined by three items concerning the evaluation apprehensive in English writing, which could be seen as in Q4, Q5, and Q25. Factor 3 obtained high outcomes from two items that involve stress apprehension during English writing test in the questions No. 7 and 21. Factor 4, 6 and 7 were mostly referred to as evaluation apprehension while there was no discussion of either stress or product apprehension. For Q24, it could not be included for factor analysis because the values of MSA (Measures of sampling Adequacy)  $< 0.5$ . See Table 4 for clear descriptions.

Table 4. Factor Analysis Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>

	Component						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Q1		.648					
Q2				-.497			
Q3					-.527		
Q4		.652					
Q5		.604					
Q6					-.364		
Q7			.763				
Q8		.443					
Q9						.824	
Q10	.673						
Q11	.489						
Q12	.473						
Q13			.657				
Q14	.562						
Q15	.544						
Q16				.713			
Q17	.656						
Q18				.646			
Q19	.679						
Q20	.655						
Q21			.506				
Q22					.843		
Q23							.803
Q25		.655					
Q26		.446					

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 10 iterations.

Looking at the data obtained in Table 4, it can be summed up that the most influential factor affecting students' levels of writing anxiety is evaluation apprehension, while stress and product apprehension are hardly the main points of levels of writing anxiety. Refer to table 5 for summary of factor analysis.

Table 5. Summary of 26 Variables become 7 Factors

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Evaluation Apprehensive, Stress Apprehensive, and Product Apprehensive</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Evaluation Apprehensive, Stress Apprehensive, and Product Apprehension</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Evaluation Apprehensive and Stress Apprehensive</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Evaluation Apprehensive</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Evaluation Apprehensive, Stress Apprehensive, and Product Apprehensive</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Evaluation Apprehensive</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Evaluation Apprehensive</b>

### **Discussion of Findings**

Findings of this study supported the writer that there would be no statistically difference in levels of writing anxiety both in male students and female students. It was found that girls had experienced medium level of writing anxiety as boys do. In other words, there is no significant difference in levels of writing anxiety on the basis of gender.

The results of this study are not consistent with many other studies; gender differences favoring girls were found in levels of writing anxiety (Martinez, 2011 and Cayton, 1990). After examining the effect of gender-based differences in levels of writing anxiety, it was clear that the magnitude of the gender difference in levels of writing anxiety was that of male students experienced higher levels of writing anxiety. Indeed, the test of significant levels of writing anxiety shown in male and female students do not show any differences of levels of writing anxiety based on gender. Therefore, it is important to consider whether these findings have any practical value during language teaching and learning activities.

The analysis of factors affecting students' levels of writing anxiety through factor analysis reveals that mostly students are anxious because of evaluation. Talking about evaluation apprehension, this means that the students will receive further insight into particular attitudes toward writing and toward the evaluation of writing. Students who experience evaluation apprehension expect to do poorly in composition courses even before the courses begin. Students feel that the teacher will give a poor grade because of the inability to express the ideas clearly. As a result, there will be no confidence during writing process.

From the explanations of factors affecting students' levels of writing anxiety, this result of study positively support previous study as done by Silva (1993:87). Apparent for all three levels is "the anxiety toward the intensiveness of writing exercises in foreign language classes." This might be explained by the fact that students see writing exercises as a kind of test and that the correction of errors is more thorough in written production than in oral production. For this reason, these findings may be associated with fear of negative evaluation.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Gender-based differences that have been found to exist in levels of writing anxiety in the current study are no statistically significant, while larger differences are consistently found in the effects of fear of negative evaluation and what so-called evaluation apprehension. Also, the findings from this study suggest that for at least some students, foreign language writing anxiety may be related to stress apprehension, in which it talks about personality.

At this point, it is also important to mention the limitation of this study. The limitation lies in the unsatisfied numbers of samples so that there is still opportunity to see bias in the result of the study. Consequently, it is suggested that in the future writing anxiety research there would be more participants included. Then, it is viewed to add more variables to get the result more deeply, like, the gender-based differences in writing achievement.

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## Appendix 1

### Questionnaire of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale in Writing

Name of Respondent / Age : \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ year(s) \_\_\_\_ month(s)  
 Sex : Female / Male \*Circle  
 Length of learning English : \_\_\_\_ year(s) \_\_\_\_ month(s)  
 Subject : Sixth Semester Student of English Study Program of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of University of PGRI Palembang  
 Objectives : To find out significant difference in writing anxiety on the basis of gender

#### Directions:

- a) Read the statements below very carefully. For each statement, among the choices 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, cross the most suitable one for you. As the findings of this test are going to be used in for research, I kindly request you be honest while answering the questions.  
**1= Strongly Agree (SA)                      2= Agree (A)                      3= Neutral (N)**  
**4= Disagree (D)                                5= Strongly Disagree (SD)**
- b) Your answers are considered to be highly valuable and will also be kept confidential. *Note:* there is NO RIGHT or WRONG RESPONSE to any of the items on this survey.
- c) Ask the researcher if you have questions.
- d) Good luck.

No.	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD
1.	I avoid writing (in English).					
2.	I have no fear of my (English) writing being evaluated.					
3.	I look forward to writing down my ideas (in English).					
4.	I am afraid of writing essays (in English) when I know they will be evaluated.					
5.	Taking (an English) composition class is a very frightening experience.					

6.	Handing in a composition (written in English) makes me feel good.					
7.	My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on a composition (in English).					
8.	Expressing ideas through writing (in English) seems to be a waste of time.					
9.	I would enjoy sending my (English) writing to magazines to be evaluated and published.					
10.	I like to write my ideas down (in English).					
11.	I feel confident in my ability to clearly express my ideas in (when) writing (in English).					
12.	I like to have my friends read what I have written (in English).					
13.	I'm nervous about writing (in English).					
14.	People seem to enjoy what I write (in English).					
15.	I enjoy writing (in English).					
16.	I never seem to be able to clearly write down my ideas (in English).					
17.	Writing (in English) is a lot of fun.					
18.	I expect to do poorly in (English) composition classes even before I enter them.					
19.	I like seeing my thoughts on paper (in English).					
20.	Discussing my (English) writing with others is an enjoyable experience.					
21.	I have a terrible time organizing my ideas in an English composition course.					
22.	When I hand in a(n English) composition I know I'm going to do poorly.					
23.	It's easy for me to write good compositions (in English).					
24.	I don't think I write as well (in English) as most people.					
25.	I don't like my (English) compositions to be evaluated.					
26.	I'm no good at writing (in English).					

## Appendix 2. Level of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety in Writing

To determine your score, first, add together all point values for positive statements (PSV) only. Second, add together all point values for negative statements (NSV) only. Then place those scores into the following formula to discover your Anxiety (WA) score:

$WA = 78 + PSV - NSV$ <p>PSV questions = 1; 4; 5; 7; 8; 13; 16; 18; 21; 22; 24; 25; 26</p> <p>NSV questions = 2; 3; 6; 9; 10; 11; 12; 14; 15; 17; 19; 20; 23</p>
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Writing Anxiety scores may range from 26 to 130. The following general observations may be made about scores in certain ranges, and only general observations, but note that the further score is from the mean of 78, the more likely the description of a range of scores will apply.

**Range 97-130: Low Level of Writing Anxiety**

**A score in this range indicates that you have a low level of writing apprehension.** The higher your score in this range, the more troublesome your lack of apprehension. You may not be motivated to listen or read carefully your assignments, to pay attention to due dates, to remember criteria for evaluation, or to act upon recommendations that might improve subsequent drafts of your essays. You do not fear writing or evaluation of writing, but you may not be adequately motivated to work on your writing.

**Range 60-96: Medium Level of Writing Anxiety**

**Most students who score in this range do not experience a significantly unusual level of writing apprehension.** However, the closer the score to the limits of this range--that is, scores close to 60 and 96--the more apt you are to experience feelings or behaviors characteristic of the next range of scores. A score of 78 places you as a writer on the mean, which is the middle point between two extremes, or condition recorded in a large sample of students. The closer you are to the mean, the better. Nonetheless, you should be alert to the fact that you may manifest signs of writing apprehension in performing certain writing tasks or in writing with varying purposes for different types of audiences. While you may not experience harmful apprehension while writing an expository essay, for example, you may experience excessive apprehension writing a placement essay for faceless evaluators or in writing an in-class essay exam for a history professor.

**Range 26-59: High Level of Writing Anxiety**

**A score in this range indicates you have a high level of writing apprehension.** The lower your score in this range, the more severe your anxiety. You are nervous about writing and fearful of evaluation. In fact, research shows that those who score extremely low in this range will not take a course, select a major, or accept a job they know involves writing.

**How to Understand Your Score**

If your score indicates either low or high levels of writing apprehension, then look closely on the questionnaire to see if you can determine which component(s) of the writing process you need to more closely monitor. Most problems of this kind fall into three main categories:

- \* evaluation apprehension,
- \* stress apprehension, and
- \* product apprehension.

a) When these specific components of writing apprehension are cross-referenced with your scoring level information, you will receive further insight into your particular attitudes toward writing and toward the evaluation of your writing.

Student writers who experience evaluation apprehension expect to do poorly in composition courses even before the courses begin. You feel as though the teacher will give you a poor grade because you cannot express your ideas clearly. As a result, you often claim to be nervous about writing, dislike showing or talking about your writing

even to friends, and do not like seeing your ideas expressed in writing. If you are evaluation apprehensive you believe other students more clearly and, as a result, receive higher grades than you do.

**Questions which you should examine to help you determine if you are evaluation apprehensive are 2, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, and 25.**

b) Those student writers who encounter stress apprehension experience fear early in the writing process, sometimes even before they have written anything. You often procrastinate and report that you do not look forward to beginning a piece of writing, even one required for a course. You experience writer's block. Your hands may cramp soon after you begin a timed writing exercise. Once you are able to begin writing, you claim to run into great difficulty organizing your thoughts.

**Questions which you should examine to help you determine if you are stress apprehensive are 1, 3, 7, 10, 15, 21, and 26.**

c) For those students who experience product apprehension, the problem does not exist at a particular stage in the writing process (as with evaluation apprehension) or with a particular skill such as invention (as in stress apprehension). Rather, product apprehensive claim that expressing ideas through writing is a waste of time. Such student writers do not clearly envision an audience or a purpose for academic writing. If you are one of these writers you tend to compose a single draft only, yet you feel uneasy about submitting an essay for a grade.

**Questions corresponding to product apprehension are 6, 8, and 17.**

Diagnosing your writing process problems will not automatically alleviate them, of course. But the information gleaned from the Daly-Miller questionnaire allows you to anticipate your particular needs and to devise strategies for reducing stress that often inhibits the development of cognitive skills.

*Source:* John Daly and Michael Miller's, "The Empirical Development of an Instrument to Measure Writing Apprehension." Research in the Teaching of English 12 (1975): 242-49. Adapted by Michael W. Smith in Reducing Writing Apprehension (Urbana: NCTE, 1984)

