

Foreign Language Anxiety in Academic Writing

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Abstract

This study is aimed to investigate Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) in academic writing specifically to EFL students at university level. The factors that cause the students feel anxious in English writing represent on close-ended questionnaires that the researcher asks the students to answer. In addition, the researcher does direct observation by acting as a passive observer where she has no role in conducting or helping the lecturer in teaching the writing course. In this case, what the researcher does is finding an appropriate spot in classroom in order to have a clear description regarding with ongoing process of teaching and learning of writing course of English Department students at Widya Gama Mahakam University, Samarinda, Indonesia. As a result, data analyzed by using Likert Scale indicate that High Anxiety (HA) appears to be the highest level in students' anxiety with nine out of sixteen anxiety statements. In addition, Moderate Anxiety (MA) is also showed on the result with six out of sixteen anxiety statements. Furthermore, although Low Anxiety (LA) appears in only one out of sixteen statements, it is correlated to other facts i.e. the apprehension of working with English writing assignment under time constraint, lack of self-confidence because of inadequate capability in English language proficiency such as structural rules in English as well as an ability to relate and compare theories among experts to support their writing. Further implication for better research and lecture of English writing course in the future is also pointed out in this study.

Keywords: Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), academic writing, anxiety factors, writing performance

A. Introduction

It is obvious that among four basic skills in English, writing has its own challenges for EFL students in university level. In this case, (Ariyanti, 2016b) said that writing course asks the students many requirements in order to have successful teaching and learning of writing output in classroom. To write an essay or a thesis seems never been so easy for university students to do. They should accomplish certain kind of essay for writing assignment and a thesis as a requirement to graduate from a university (Ariyanti, 2016a). One of the obligations that the students need to fulfill is well-arranged writing steps which they should follow, starting from pick a suitable topic for an essay type that the students should compose, make an outline, follow the process of drafting, revising, and editing, and finally get a proofreading from someone who is expert in English writing area in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the writing quality (Gibbons, 2002).

Without leaving aside the importance of having an advance English writing as well as the eligible procedures that the students should stress out, one of psychological factors which is anxiety possible to contribute to the students' writing production. Anxiety is like a virus that contaminates the way the students gain their learning achievement. It is harmful for students' improvement and "block the students from thinking clearly" (Negari & Rezaabadi, 2012). "There are so many students in almost every educational institution suffer from anxiety" (Öztürk & Çecen, 2007). In other words, the feeling of apprehension in ongoing learning process often or even always reveal in every single aspect of students' learning.

Furthermore, what to be the most important reason of researching the FLA is this term can be a parameter of successfulness of students' learning outcomes. As Aydin & Zengin (2008) and Abu-Rabia (2004) explained that when students indicate to have high level of anxiety, positively it can effect to the low level of successfulness gained by the students. Similarly, Öztürk & Çecen (2007) pointed out that the quality of students' writing outcomes with low anxiety level is better than those who tend to take too much anxious in doing their writing tasks. In addition, Öztürk & Çecen (2007) also noted that the students who are seriously affected to anxiety problem will be regarded as unskilled writers because their apprehension may bring them far from writing instruction as well as being unmotivated personalities to increase their writing ability.

Several studies were interested in exploring Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) to the core skills in English language acquisition. First study comes from Jebreil et al. (2015) where they investigate about the effect of gender aspect to Iranian writing's performance. As a result, they found that there is a significant different between males and female students' writing production in terms of grammar and punctuation. In this case, the males get higher anxiety than the females. In addition, males' cognitive anxiety also higher than females, therefore, these two findings indicate that males have greater amount of anxiety rather than females. FLA related to gender element is not only researched by Jebreil et al. (2015) but also another researcher such as Karatas et al. (2016). In their findings, female students are more suffer on anxiety rather than male students. This study findings are different with Jebreil et al. (2015) because Karatas et al. (2016) relate the anxiety level to other aspects in students' lives such as language level, achieving English preparatory training, and high school where the students graduated from.

Another study which is seemingly alike as Jebreil et al. (2015) and Karatas et al. (2016), Capan & Karaca (2013) have a research on FLA related to gender and level of students' education. In their study, they focus on two other core skills in English language proficiency, they are comparing between listening and reading anxiety. To the more particular to the result, the findings showed that there is positive correlation between reading and listening anxiety and moderate correlation appears between reading anxiety and the level of the students' education.

The last study related to FLA derives from Suleimenova (2013). Unlike the studies above, Suleimenova focuses on students' speaking anxiety that is caused by several factors. The first factor that appears in the result is related to unwell-designed of Kazakhstani educational system which is inappropriate to improve students' communicative competence. This fact confirms to the result that most of the students should struggle with anxiety when they have to practice their English speaking.

Furthermore, for the sake of the development of English teaching research and knowledge, the researcher tries to take the red line on the similarities as well as differences exist on the previous studies which have mentioned above comparing to the study that the researcher conducts. Specifically, basic similarity between previous studies and this research is on the "anxiety" term which is used as the focus in the research. On the contrary, the difference between the previous research and this research is on what skill that the researchers investigate the anxiety. To summarize, three researchers conducted a research on anxiety related to gender, they are Jebreil et al. (2015) who focus on students' writing performance related to gender aspect, Karatas et al. (2016) focus on English learning in general and relate gender aspect to students' language level, preparatory training, and high school where the students finish their previous study, and Capan & Karaca (2013) who investigate gender in relation to students' level of education and compare between listening and reading anxiety. In addition, Suleimenova (2013) focuses on factors that influence the students' speaking performance, while this research also focuses on the factors that significantly take a role in students' learning but typically in English writing.

To the more particular case in this research, the researcher focuses on the FLA in academic writing specifically to fourth semester students of English Department at Widya Gama Mahakam University, Samarinda, Indonesia. It is considered to be a crucial matter to be researched because FLA is seriously giving influence to the EFL students' writing production to many parts of writing performance. Therefore, many studies have interest in investigating FLA for many years until the present time (Ellis, 2008). The students need to release their pain of being too anxious in the learning process of writing where the researcher also intends to provide as much as information to lecturers in university level regarding with the factors in FLA that influences the EFL students' writing performance.

B. The Interplay of FLA in EFL Students' Writing Performance

Anxiety has already appeared in many aspects in language teaching for decades (Negari & Rezaabadi, 2012). All of English basic skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening have been the media where anxiety can develop to affect the students' psychology in achieving a successful learning. Particularly, anxiety take its role in language learning in two ways, positive and negative sides, but unfortunately too

much anxiety will tend to bring the EFL students to a big deal. As Negari & Rezaabadi (2012) pointed out that even though little amount of anxiety is needed by EFL students in order to be more careful on the usage of English, but too much apprehension will affect the students' performance negatively and drive them to big problems. In addition, Wu (2010) said it is true that anxiety is a major challenge for EFL students so that they need to find a way to overcome that feeling of apprehension. That is why there are many studies which have such an interest on investigating the anxiety to many aspects of students' learning as well as several strategies in order the students' can figure out the tension that is caused by anxiety.

To the more particular study about anxiety to EFL learners, Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) seems always influence EFL students in achieving English skills. As Capan & Karaca (2013) said that FLA is a complicated psychological phenomenon which somehow gives significant impact to learners of certain language. The existence of anxiety in most of EFL students' learning sessions are cannot be neglected, but a question must arise to the surface that why FLA play an important role in determining the students' writing quality. Therefore, to dig more on factors included in FLA, some experts have researched about the factors that cause the students anxiety in English writing.

Specifically, the feeling of apprehension or anxiety possibly cause avoidance attitude from doing the writing assignment (Yastibas & Yastibas, 2015). Not only about attitude point, anxiety has double impact to the students' writing performance where the students will assume that they do not have good capability in English language proficiency so that they will be discouraged to write the English writing assignment (Rodriguez & Abreu, 2003). In other words, that it is true that anxiety has strong connection to students' motivation and learning attitude (Liu & Cheng, 2014) as well as self-confidence (Liu, 2012).

To the more specific factors that cause the EFL students anxiety are explained by Cheng (2002). In this case, he pointed out the factors in FLA that cooperate to influence the students' writing quality include the successful criteria of writing course, high expectation from teacher and parents, the method of assessing the students' writing, time set by teachers, motivation, attitudes toward the lesson, self-assurance, students' beliefs, and also target language proficiency.

Furthermore, writing process is very complex to many aspects starting from content to grammatical terms that can make the EFL students anxious in doing the writing tasks. The matter of finding suitable ideas to begin to write certain type of essay, find relevant theories and information to the topic to be written, combine and compare among theories with correct structure of English are the demand in writing assignment that make the students feeling too worry and anxious (Yastibas & Yastibas, 2015). The factors which cause the students' anxiety are also added by Karakaya & Ülper (2011), they are students' personalities and attitudes, students-teachers' opinion towards the writing assignment result, interaction between students and teacher, classroom environment, and writing exam. To sum up, anxiety can give multiple impacts to the students' learning and quality of their English writing production since to the English writing assignment itself has become a complicated task for the EFL to figure out.

C. Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This research is a descriptive qualitative study where the researcher explores as much as information and data regarding with the FLA exist in academic writing on the semester students of English Department at Widya Gama Mahakam University, Samarinda, Indonesia. In addition, the data students' level of anxiety found are displayed in the form of percentage and interpreted in the form of words description. As Merriam (2009) said that a qualitative researcher obtains data from natural phenomenon happened as individual or groups where he or she tries to interpret the meaning behind the data found. In support of Merriam's theory, Yin (2011) mentioned that when a researcher decides to be a qualitative researcher, the area of study that he can analyze is an event to be researched is in terms of real-world setting such as teaching and learning in classroom, etc., the way people encountering and coping with certain problem happened the setting of everyday lives.

2. Research Subject

In this research, the researcher takes the students on fourth semester of English Department at Widya Gama Mahakam University, Samarinda, Indonesia with the total number of the subject is thirty three students. The consideration of taking those students is the learning objective of writing course on the fourth semester is to enable the students to have an advance ability to write different kind of essays. Therefore, the topic to be researched in this study is considered suitable to these students.

3. Research Instruments

Since this research is a qualitative study, the main instrument in this research is the researcher herself (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). In addition, in order to ease the researcher to analyze the students' level of writing anxiety, below aspects which become factors that cause the EFL students feel anxious when writing which are summarized from above theories from (Cheng, 2002; Yastibas & Yastibas, 2015; Karakaya & Ülper, 2011):

- a. Successful criteria from writing course objective
- b. High expectation from lecturer and parents
- c. Method of assessing the students' writing
- d. Time set by lecturer
- e. Motivation
- f. Attitudes
- g. Self-confidence
- h. English language proficiency
- i. Finding suitable ideas to begin to write certain type of essay
- j. Find relevant theories and information to the topic to be written
- k. Combine and compare among theories with correct structure of English
- l. Students and lecturer's opinion towards the writing assignment result
- m. Interaction between students and lecturer
- n. Classroom environment
- o. Writing exam

4. Data Collecting Techniques and Procedures

A qualitative researcher possibly can use several techniques observation, field notes, interview, questionnaire, and examining records (Gay et al., 2006). Specifically to this research, the researcher does the following techniques to collect the data:

- a. *Direct observation*: The researcher acts as a passive observer where she does not play any role on the teaching and learning process of English writing course. She chooses a strategic spot in the classroom so that she can capture every single phenomenon happened in the classroom during the process of teaching and learning.
- b. *Close-ended questionnaires*: The researcher distributes close-ended questionnaires to the students to obtain the data related to the students' anxiety towards the academic writing class.

5. Data Analysis Techniques

From close-ended questionnaires, the data found are analyzed based on Likert Scale followed by five types of format: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). The Likert Scale is used to measure belief, preference, judgment, and opinion (Warmbrod, 2014). The result from Likert Scale is divided and analyzed into three types, they are High Anxiety (HA), Moderate Anxiety (MA), and Low Anxiety (LA) (*adapted from Rezaei & Jafari (2014)*). In addition, the researcher also combines the result from questionnaires to the data found from direct observation which is done by the researcher directly to the teaching and learning process of English writing course.

D. Findings and Discussion

The findings displayed on below tables are based on the total number of students who choose one of the Likert Scales due to the Anxiety statements.

Table 1. Causes of EFL Students' Writing Anxiety Level

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA
When I write an English essay:					
1. I feel under pressure because of writing successful criteria	0	3	0	22	8
2. I feel under pressure because of high expectation from lecturer and parents	0	5	0	20	8
3. I am afraid of negative comment from lecturer	0	0	0	7	26
4. I feel stress enough if writing under time constraint	0	0	0	3	30
5. I feel less motivated in doing writing assignment	0	9	0	14	10
6. I tend to avoid to do the writing assignment	0	9	0	15	9
7. I have low self-confidence in English writing	0	0	0	2	31
8. I do not have a good English language proficiency	0	0	0	2	31
9. I feel stress because I do not have any idea to write due to different kind of essay tasks given by lecturer	0	5	0	15	13
10. I face a problem on finding theories that relevant to the essay topic	0	0	0	3	30
11. It is very difficult to combine and compare the theories from experts with correct structure of English	0	0	0	3	30

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA
12. I doubt about the quality of my English writing	0	0	0	0	33
13. I am afraid of lecturer's opinion towards the quality of my English writing	0	0	0	7	26
14. I face writing difficulties because the lecturer seldom provide essay face to face consultation	5	25	3	0	0
15. The classroom environment does not support the writing learning	0	0	0	10	23
16. I am afraid of English writing exam	0	7	0	23	3

Table 2. Recapitulation of Causes of EFL Students' Writing Anxiety Level Due to Dominant Scale

Likert Scale	Statements															
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
SD																
D													25			
N																
A	22	20		30		15			15							23
SA			26		14		31	31		30	30	33	26		23	

From the result displayed on the tables above, we can recognize the pattern shaped from the Likert Scale. Most of the students say Agree and Strongly Agree towards the anxiety statements related to the English writing subject in the classroom, which strongly shows below patterns:

- a. High Anxiety (HA) which reflects on below statements:
3 (negative comment from the lecturer), 5 (low motivation), 7 (low self-confidence), 8 (poor English language proficiency), 10 (difficult to find relevant theories to support the essay), 11 (difficult to combine and compare theories from experts with good English structure), 12 (doubt about the quality of the English writing), 13 (afraid of the lecturer's opinion toward the English writing production), and 15 (less conducive classroom environment).
- b. Moderate Anxiety (MA) which reflects on below statements:
1 (being under pressured because of the successful criteria set in the writing course), 2 (being under pressured because of high expectation from lecturer and parents), 4 (feel stress enough because when writing under time constraint), 6 (avoid to do the writing tasks), 9 (do not have any idea in writing different kind of writing assignment given by the lecturer), and 16 (afraid of English writing exam).
- c. Low Anxiety (LA) which reflects on below statement:
14 (face difficulties because the lecturer seldom conducts face to face essay consultation).

Based on above findings, HA appears to be the highest level of students' FLA in English writing. To summarize, several factors are correlated to others. Particularly, the students' apprehension of having negative comment, their difficulties on finding relevant theories from experts as well as compare and combine those theories with correct English structure are derived from low self-confidence and doubt regarding

with their English writing quality because of their poor English language proficiency. This fact makes them discourage because they are afraid of the lecturer's opinion toward the production of their English writing. These correlated facts confirm the theory from Rodriguez & Abreu (2003) who stated that self-confidence and motivation are like two sides of a coin which influenced by anxiety.

Furthermore, HA is also indicated by the less conducive classroom environment. Specifically, when the lecturer provides the students with an opportunity to discuss their essay draft to the lecturer, the condition of the class becomes noisy and the lecturer cannot handle this problem because she is concentrating on a student in front of her desk and discussing about the student's essay. This fact, somehow, has a correlation to the LA level on the fourteenth statement, which is *"I face writing difficulties because the lecturer seldom provide essay face to face consultation"*. It confirms the researcher's direct observation to the writing class that the lecturer provides the students with essay consultation to the students who are confuse with the lecturer's revision to the writing draft individually. Therefore, there is no doubt that most of students choose to say *"Disagree"* toward that statement. However, although the lecturer provides the students with essay face to face interaction, the students still encounter difficulties in English writing such as grammatical problems, combine and compare the ideas among experts' theories, and find suitable ideas to write due to different kind of writing assignment given by the lecturer.

Regarding with MA level, the students have a major attitude problem that they tend to avoid the writing assignment given by the lecturer (Yastibas & Yastibas, 2015). This result brings the students far from writing instruction and makes them feel under pressure to write under time constraint with high expectation from the lecturer and parents following by successful criteria they should pass. Because of the avoidance attitude, the students feel difficult in forming ideas to write in their assignment. Finally, the accumulation of these problems triggers the students' apprehension on facing the writing exam.

Furthermore, above result confirm that the factors that cause the students' anxiety which proposed by Cheng (2002), Yastibas & Yastibas (2015), Rodriguez & Abreu (2003) and Karakaya & Ülper (2011) are connected each other. There are many students who get medium to low grade on the English writing class which somehow must have correlation to their level of anxiety. This fact is supported by the theories from Aydin & Zengin (2008), Abu-Rabia (2004) and Öztürk & Çecen (2007) that the higher level of anxiety the students have, the lower achievement on English writing they perceive.

E. Conclusion

From above findings and discussion, there are several points that the researcher can conclude. Firstly, High Anxiety (HA) appears to be the highest level of the students' anxiety followed by Medium Anxiety (MA). Secondly, the data found by the researcher are confirmed by the theories of factors that cause the students' apprehension. Thirdly, above all findings about HA and MA levels, Low Anxiety (LA) also comes up into surface with one statement and relate to three other statements. The cause of the students' anxiety in doing English writing assignment is not because the lecturer seldom provides the students with essay face to face consultation. In fact, the

lecturer always conducts direct interaction to the students individually on every essay drafting process. However, even though the students have discussion session in the essay consultation to the lecturer, the condition in the classroom becomes not very conducive because the rest of students who are waiting for the consultation turn make a kind of noisy sound by talking one to another with the topic which is out of learning of writing context.

Moreover, the students also feel that doing the writing assignment under time constraint is a big pressure for them and get them upset. In addition, the internal factor of being worried about having lack of confidence also appears because of their inadequate capability in English language proficiency such as grammatical terms and relate ideas from experts' theories to support their essay content. For future implication regarding with the method to improve the students' quality in academic writing assignment, the lecturer must have brand new methods which can be combined to face to face interaction to the students individually. It is also suggested for the next researchers who are eager to conduct a research with similar area with the researcher to explore more ideas or methods that can be used to solve the EFL students' problems on encountering anxiety in English writing.

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