



Research Article

Writing Anxiety and Writing Competence Among Junior High School Students

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the link between writing anxiety and writing competence among junior high school students, addressing the challenge that anxiety can pose to effective learning. The main aim was to investigate how different writing anxiety levels affect students' writing ability competently. Using a descriptive-correlational design, the study involved 60 randomly selected students from a public school in Misamis Occidental, Philippines. Writing anxiety levels were measured using the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), and writing competence was assessed through a persuasive essay rubric. Students were grouped by high or moderate anxiety based on their SLWAI scores. Key statistical analyses included mean and standard deviation calculations, Pearson's correlation coefficient, and independent sample t-tests. Results indicated that students with high anxiety levels showed higher cognitive, somatic, and avoidance anxiety, along with lower writing competence, while those with moderate anxiety displayed average writing skills. However, the two groups had no statistically significant difference in competence. The study found a meaningful correlation between anxiety levels and writing competence. It was concluded that high-anxiety students experience distinct challenges, such as time pressure, while moderate-anxiety students feel more comfortable writing in English. Recommendations suggest that language teachers use a Language-Experience Approach, beginning at students' comfort level and gradually addressing social factors contributing to anxiety. Expanding the study with more participants could improve the generalizability of these findings.

Keywords: *Avoidance behavior anxiety; Writing anxiety; Writing competence; Persuasive; Cognitive anxiety; and Somatic anxiety.*

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Introduction

Writing proficiency is essential for academic and professional success, yet it remains one of the most challenging skills for both native and second-language learners. Learners frequently struggle with writing due to cognitive demands, language constraints, and factors like writing anxiety. Writing requires strong linguistic, cognitive, and memory skills, including quickly retrieving relevant information, applying appropriate vocabulary, and structuring ideas coherently. Additional challenges for second language (L2) learners include a lack of familiarity with language conventions and heightened anxiety, which can hinder writing ability and lead to avoidance behaviors in writing tasks (Cheng, 2002; Javid & Umer, 2014).

Research has shown that writing anxiety among L2 learners stems from various factors, including fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and peer pressure (Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2015; Aragao, 2011). This anxiety often affects learners' engagement in writing activities, leading them to avoid writing courses or assignments (Cheng, 2002; Jarvis, 2000). Saudi students, for example, tend to employ knowledge-telling rather than critical analysis in their writing, which limits their ability to engage with complex topics (Shukuri, 2014). Moreover, studies indicate that writing anxiety can adversely impact academic performance, as learners become more focused on avoiding mistakes than on developing their writing skills (Hassan, 2001; Kabigting et al., 2020).

Though some studies suggest that mild anxiety can enhance focus and caution, high anxiety levels typically lead to poorer writing outcomes and decreased participation in language-learning activities (Horwitz, 2001). Previous research highlights the need to understand better the factors contributing to writing anxiety in L2 learners, particularly in secondary school students, to develop effective teaching strategies that can create supportive, low-anxiety learning environments (Lin, 2009; Alsowat, 2016).

This study examines junior high school students' perspectives on writing and proficiency levels. By identifying sources of writing anxiety and exploring ways to reduce it, the research offers practical suggestions for L2 teachers to foster more comfortable, less stressful language-learning experiences.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to determine the relationship between writing anxiety and writing competence among junior high school students. The descriptive component was used to describe the existing levels of writing anxiety and writing competence, while the correlational approach examined the statistical relationship between these two variables without implying causation (Grand Canyon University, 2015). The study was conducted in a public high school in the district of Jimenez, Misamis Occidental, selected for its accessibility, diverse student population, and suitability for investigating English writing performance among learners transitioning from the disruptions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 102 students were selected through random sampling to ensure representativeness of the population. Data were collected using a two-part research instrument consisting of the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) developed by Cheng (2004), a validated 22-item instrument measuring cognitive, somatic, and avoidance dimensions of writing anxiety using a five-point Likert scale, and a persuasive writing task based on the RAFT Model. The writing outputs were evaluated independently by three experienced language teachers using a rubric adapted from Arkaina et al. (2014), which assessed the introduction, facts of the case, supporting details, and grammar and writing conventions. The resulting scores were converted into Mean Percentage Scores (MPS) and interpreted using the descriptive equivalents prescribed in DepEd Memorandum No. 160, s. 2012. Prior to data collection, the researcher secured approval from the Schools Division Superintendent and the school principal, distributed informed consent forms to all participants, and ensured that only students with signed consent forms participated in the study. The SLWAI was administered to all 102 respondents, after which the 30 students with the highest anxiety levels and the 30 students with moderate anxiety levels were selected to complete the writing task. All writing outputs were assessed by the three evaluators under established health and ethical protocols. Data analysis employed both descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and standard deviation to describe the variables, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient to determine the relationship between writing anxiety and writing competence, and an independent samples t-test to identify significant differences between the high- and moderate-anxiety groups. Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (2019), with hypothesis testing based on the established level of significance. Throughout the conduct of the study, ethical principles were strictly observed in accordance with Republic Act No. 10173, otherwise known as the

Data Privacy Act of 2012, by ensuring proper acknowledgment of intellectual property, maintaining participants' anonymity and confidentiality, securing voluntary participation through informed consent, safeguarding all collected data, respecting participants' right to withdraw at any stage of the study, and ensuring that all data and findings were reported truthfully and used solely for academic research purposes.

Results and Discussions

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the writing anxiety among high anxiety group and moderate anxiety group in terms of cognitive anxiety

Indicator	High Anxiety			Moderate Anxiety		
	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. While writing in English, I am not nervous.	4.00	1.02	High	4.00	0.69	High
2. While writing English compositions, I feel worried and uneasy if I know they will be evaluated.	3.97	0.85	High	2.80	1.10	Moderate
3. I do not worry that my English compositions are much worse than others.	3.83	1.02	High	2.97	1.19	Moderate
4. If my English composition is to be evaluated, I would worry about getting a very poor grade.	4.13	0.78	High	3.27	1.26	Moderate
5. I am afraid that other students would deride my English composition if they read it	4.27	0.91	High	3.07	1.08	Moderate
6. I do not worry about other people's opinions of my English compositions.	3.93	1.08	High	3.53	1.20	High
7. I fear my English composition being chosen as a sample to discuss in class.	4.20	0.81	High	2.60	1.13	Moderate
8. I am not afraid at all that my English compositions would be rated as very poor.	3.70	1.02	High	2.67	1.09	Moderate
Overall Mean	4.00	0.19	High	3.11	0.47	Moderate

Scale: 1.00–1.50 – Very Low; 1.51–2.50 – Low; 2.51–3.50– Moderate; 3.51–4.50 –High; and 4.51-5.00-Very High

The level of writing anxiety among the high anxiety group in terms of cognitive anxiety, as shown in Table 1, was categorized as High with an overall mean of 4.00 and a standard deviation of 0.19. The results can be interpreted that students from this group have high cognitive anxiety if other students read their composition and make fun of it.

Peers' actions can also influence anxiety among learners. Language learners feel hesitant and embarrassed to participate in assignments provided to them because of peer criticism and amusement at their performance in class. They also experience increased anxiety when required to participate in speaking or writing projects (Aragao, 2011).

On the contrary, the level of writing anxiety among the moderate anxiety group in terms of cognitive anxiety, as shown in Table 1, was categorized as Moderate with an overall mean of 3.11 and a standard deviation of 0.47. The results show that students from this group have an average level of cognitive anxiousness as they have a moderate overall mean and are not nervous when told to write English.

The level of writing anxiety among the high anxiety group in terms of somatic anxiety, as shown in Table 2, was categorized as High with an overall weighted mean of 4.21 and a standard deviation of 0.22. The results imply that the high anxiety group is greatly affected when told to write compositions under a time constraint.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the writing anxiety among high anxiety group and moderate anxiety group in terms of somatic anxiety

Indicator Somatic Anxiety	High Anxiety			Moderate Anxiety		
	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I feel my heart pounding when I write English compositions under time constraints.	4.47	0.82	High	3.57	1.07	High
2. My mind often goes blank when I start to work on an English composition.	4.10	1.18	High	2.83	0.95	Moderate
3. I tremble or perspire when I write English compositions under time pressure.	4.10	0.99	High	3.27	1.14	Moderate
4. My thoughts become jumbled when I write English compositions under time constraints.	4.40	0.77	High	2.87	1.04	Moderate
5. I often feel panic when I write English compositions under time constraints.	4.43	0.63	High	3.23	1.10	Moderate
6. I freeze up when unexpectedly asked to write English compositions.	3.97	0.81	High	2.40	0.77	Low
7. I usually feel rigid and tense when writing English compositions.	4.00	0.74	High	2.77	1.04	Moderate
. Overall Mean	4.21	0.22	High	2.99	0.39	Moderate

Scale: 1.00 –1.50 – Very Low; 1.51–2.50 – Low; 2.51–3.50– Moderate;3.51–4.50 –High; and 4.51-5.00-Very High

This is true, as 44 third-year English Department students at the University of Islam Malang found that students suffer high levels of anxiety when they must complete writing exams quickly (Kurniasih, 2013). According to the SLWAI analysis, the mean writing anxiety score is 65.86, which is a high level of anxiety. Therefore, the study revealed that writing tasks with time constraints can hinder one's writing performance.

Nevertheless, the level of writing anxiety among the moderate anxiety group in terms of somatic anxiety, as shown in Table 2, was categorized as Moderate with an overall weighted mean of 2.99 and a standard deviation of 0.39. The results imply that even the moderate anxiety group is affected when told to make their composition under a time constraint. This result can be supported again by the study mentioned above by Kurniasih (2013).

The third indicator of writing anxiety is avoidance behavior anxiety. This indicator shows a behavior someone uses to refuse or avoid any task/ feelings concerning writing.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the writing anxiety among the high anxiety group and moderate anxiety group in terms of avoidance behavior anxiety

Indicator Avoidance Behavior Anxiety	High Anxiety			Moderate Anxiety		
	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I often choose to write down my thoughts in English.	3.73	0.87	High	3.77	0.86	High
2. I usually do my best to avoid writing English compositions.	4.00	0.87	High	2.17	0.83	Low
3. I do my best to avoid situations where I must write in English.	3.83	0.91	High	2.60	1.04	Moderate
4. I would not use English to write compositions unless I have no choice.	3.27	0.94	Moderate	1.97	0.85	Low
5. I would try to excuse myself if asked to write English compositions.	3.47	1.11	Moderate	2.23	0.73	Low
6. I usually seek every chance to write English composition outside class.	3.60	0.93	High	3.03	1.20	Moderate
7. Whenever possible, I would use English to write compositions.	3.77	0.97	High	3.33	1.27	Moderate
Overall Mean	3.67	0.24	High	2.73	0.67	Moderate

The level of writing anxiety among the high anxiety group regarding avoidance behavior, as shown in Table 3, was categorized as High with an overall weighted mean of 3.67 and a standard deviation of 0.24. The results imply that several students from this group are doing their best to avoid situations where they are required to

write in English. This shows that these students avoid writing because they know they are not proficient in making one. They are aware that they need more knowledge in writing.

Their writing anxiety can also influence how students feel about writing assignments. Since writing courses include many writing activities, students with high anxiety about writing tend to avoid taking them (Cheng, 2002). Instead, they favor enrolling in classes with little writing assignments. Additionally, individuals who suffer from severe anxiety avoid participating in class activities (avoidance behavior) (Jebreil et al., 2015). In addition, research on the impact of anxiety on students' propensity to write indicated that students with high anxiety levels might decide not to write (Rahim & Hayas, 2014). This is especially important for low-proficiency kids. After all, they are likelier to avoid writing because they are not exposed to vocabulary and language abilities (Daud et al., 2005). Students' fear of writing is caused by various factors, including a lack of understanding of English grammar and a negative attitude about writing (Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2015). The researcher observed these factors during the study, and a few students tended to withdraw from participating in the persuasive writing activity. Some students refuse to participate in the writing activity since they believe they cannot write. Their negative thinking carried them to the point that they could not do it.

This expression already displayed a negative attitude toward writing. This also connects to a lack of understanding of English grammar or subject matter since a person will not decline to do such if he/she has enough understanding and knowledge of how to make it. Nevertheless, the level of writing anxiety among the moderate anxiety group regarding avoidance behavior, as shown in Table 3, was categorized as Moderate with an overall weighted mean of 2.73 and a standard deviation of 0.67. The results imply that this group of students is comfortable using English when writing their thoughts.

When a learner's degree of writing anxiety is low, they write more effectively than those who have high levels (Hassan, 2001). According to a study by Hassan (2001) on third-year English Department students in Egypt, pupils with low writing anxiety produce better essays because they have strong self-esteem. These pupils enjoy writing and are assured of their abilities (Hassan, 2001). Similar results were found in research by Jebreil et al. (2015) on Iranian EFL students of various competency levels. They discovered that students with intermediate and advanced levels, who had lower writing anxiety levels in English than students with low proficiency levels, feel confident in their writing because they do not hate writing.

The summary level of writing anxiety among the high anxiety group within three indicators (cognitive, somatic, and avoidance behavior) is shown in Table 4. It can be gleaned from the table that the high anxiety group had a High overall interpretation among the three indicators (cognitive, somatic, and avoidance behavior), with an overall mean of 3.96 and a standard deviation of 0.27. Among the three indicators, somatic anxiety had the highest overall weighted mean of 4.2 and a standard deviation of 0.22, which was interpreted as high. Avoidance behavior anxiety garnered the lowest weighted mean of 3.67, with a standard deviation of 0.24, and can be interpreted as high. It can be inferred from the results that students from this group are most affected by anxiety physically.

Table 4. Summary of results

Indicators	High Anxiety			Moderate Anxiety		
	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Cognitive Anxiety	4.00	0.19	High	3.11	0.47	Moderate
Somatic Anxiety	4.21	0.22	High	2.99	0.39	Moderate
Avoidance Behavior Anxiety	3.67	0.24	High	2.73	0.67	Moderate
Overall Mean	3.96	0.27	High	2.94	0.19	Moderate

Somatic anxiety is understanding the physical effects of experiencing anxiety, such as jitters and stress. Often, pupils feel frightened about excessive anxiety when they are under a time limit and have not come up with any ideas. When assigned a writing assignment with a deadline, somatic anxiety students become tense and worried. (Cheng, 2004). Nonetheless, the summary level of writing anxiety among the moderate anxiety group within three indicators is also shown in Table 4. It can be gleaned from the table that the moderate anxiety group had a moderate overall interpretation of the three indicators (cognitive, somatic, and avoidance behavior), with an overall mean of 2.94 and a standard deviation of 0.19. Among the three indicators, cognitive anxiety had the

highest overall weighted mean of 3.11 and a standard deviation of 0.47, which was interpreted as moderate. Avoidance behavior anxiety garnered the lowest weighted mean of 2.73, with a standard deviation of 0.67, and can be interpreted as moderate. It can be inferred from the results that students from this group are most affected by anxiety in terms of mental aspects. The term "cognitive anxiety" describes the mental components of anxiety, such as unfavorable expectations, performance obsession, and worry about how others will perceive you. The expectations of other students or teachers significantly impact how students write their essays. Cognitive anxiety is writing anxiety that concerns students' negative expectations about the presentation of their writing and worries about other things (Cheng, 2004).

Students' Writing Competence

The writing competence among the high anxiety group in terms of a persuasive essay, as shown in Table 5, was given the descriptive equivalent of "Low" with an overall weighted mean of 6.84 and a standard deviation of 2.94. Among the four criteria of persuasive essay, the high anxiety group got the highest mean in terms of "Details," which has a 7.77 weighted mean, and the lowest is "Introduction," which has a weighted mean of 4.57. The results imply that students from this group can write an interesting introduction; ideas are clear and are maintained in the succeeding paragraphs. However, they are not good at establishing their thesis statement and their catchy hook to start their paragraph. It can also be inferred from the result of this group that they need more guidance and reinforcement from the teachers to improve their writing competence since their level of writing competence is low.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of the writing competence between high anxiety and moderate anxiety group in a persuasive essay

Criteria	High Anxiety				Moderate Anxiety			
	Mean	SD	MPS	Descriptive Equivalent	Mean	SD	MPS	Descriptive Equivalent
Introduction	4.57	1.85	38%	Average	5.82	1.85	48%	Average
Facts of the Case	7.49	3.84	31%	Low	10.92	3.99	45%	Average
Details	7.77	3.57	32%	Low	11.10	3.90	46%	Average
Grammar and Writing Conventions	7.56	2.93	37%	Average	10.29	3.29	51%	Average
Overall Mean	6.84	2.94	34%	Low	9.53	3.14	47%	Average

Descriptive Equivalent: 96-100% -Mastered; 86 – 95% Closely Approximating Mastery; 66 – 85% Moving Towards Mastery; 35 – 65% Average; 15 – 34% Low; 5 – 14% Very Low; 0 – 4% Absolutely No Mastery

On the other note, the writing competence among the moderate anxiety group in terms of a persuasive essay, as shown in Table No. 5, was given the descriptive equivalent of "Average" with an overall weighted mean of 9.53 and a standard deviation of 3.14. Among the four persuasive essay criteria, the moderate anxiety group got the highest mean in terms of "Details" with 11. The lowest weighted mean is "Introduction," with a weighted mean 5.82. The results imply that this group of students is also good at expounding their ideas clearly and comprehensibly. Nevertheless, they also find it challenging to establish the thesis statement and introduction about the topic, just like the high anxiety group. Moreover, the results suggest that this group of students obtained an optimal level of performance and that they can still improve their writing performance since they are more relaxed. This can be supported by the study of two Harvard psychologists, Robert M. Yerkes, and John Dillingham Dodson, who accentuated that the level of performance among humans and animals can still be improved with moderate anxiety.

Difference in the Writing Competence Between the High Anxiety and Moderate Anxiety Groups

In Table 6, the difference in writing competence between the high-anxiety and moderate-anxiety groups was tested. This table shows the significant difference in writing competence between the high anxiety and the moderate anxiety groups. T-test results obtain a computed p-value of 0.001, which is relatively lower than the alpha 0.05 level of significance, which means there is a significant difference in writing competence between the high anxiety and moderate anxiety groups.

Table 6. Test of difference in the writing competence between the high anxiety and moderate anxiety groups

Parameters	p-value	Alpha	Decision
Writing Competence between High Anxiety and Moderate Anxiety Group	0.001	0.05	Reject Ho

Relationship Between Writing Anxiety and Students' Writing Competence

The relationship between the level of writing anxiety and the students' writing competence was tested in the table below. This table shows the correlation test between writing anxiety and writing competence. Statistical computation using the Pearson correlational test obtained a Pearson "r" value of -0.065, which can be interpreted as Negligible Correlation or Very Weak Correlation between the two parameters, with a p-value of 0.623 and interpreted as "Without Significant Relationship". This result reveals that the level of writing anxiety does not affect the level of writing competence. Additionally, this result proved that highly anxious learners are not all low-performing students in writing and low anxious learners are not all high-performing students. In a broader sense, results unveil that these students who got high levels of anxiety yet got high scores in writing are just anxious ones, but their anxiousness has nothing to do with their performance. On the other side, these students who have low anxiety levels yet low writing performance depict that there might be some reasons that affect them more than their anxiousness.

Table 7. Test of the relationship between writing anxiety and students' writing competence

Variables	Pearson "r"	Interpretation	p-value	Interpretation
Writing Anxiety and Students' Writing Competence	*-0.065	Negligible Correlation	0.623	Not Significant

This result is supported by the study of Horwitz (2001), which claimed that students who experience high levels of anxiety can still write well. In other words, writing anxiety can be employed as a brake to prevent errors. Students' writing anxiety might have good and bad effects. Anxiety does not necessarily have a bad impact on students. It can increase students' knowledge of the value of good language, original ideas, and essay consistency and unity. A little anxiety encourages pupils to be more cautious in writing. It is evident that high-anxiety students struggle with anxiety because they worry about receiving a bad score; as a result, they give their best effort when writing compositions (Brown, 2007; Horwitz, 2001).

Besides, the result of the study implies to teachers that putting pressure on students in writing is okay if students have developed their intrinsic motivation. For teachers, students' intrinsic motivation can be raised through interesting learning opportunities. Teachers must convey knowledge in a way that catches the interest of their pupils. For instance, teachers can use school community members, hold sessions outside of the classroom, or have students dress up as particular characters. The fight against low motivation, aversion to the subjects, and disruption of classroom management can all be helped by engaging the students (Handley, 2010).

Furthermore, a teacher's enthusiasm or passion has a big impact on the atmosphere in the classroom, raising the importance of the assignment and igniting students' curiosity (Metcalf & Game, 2006). Silence would fill the classroom as students waited impatiently to hear about the 'interesting' learning experience, according to Valerio (2011). Teachers can show their enthusiasm for learning through various "facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice" (Palmer, 2007, p.41). The enthusiasm of a teacher's voice can inspire pupils to want to learn more by making them feel the material has intrinsic value (Palmer, 2007).

Conclusions

The study concludes that high-anxiety and moderate-anxiety groups experience anxiety differently in writing tasks. The high-anxiety group tends to worry more about time pressure, while the moderate-anxiety group generally feels more at ease when writing in English. Interestingly, some students with high anxiety still perform well in writing, suggesting that anxiety does not necessarily lead to poor writing skills. These students may be capable writers who experience heightened anxiety due to concerns about low scores. However, overall, the high-anxiety group showed lower writing competence compared to the moderate-anxiety group, indicating a need for additional support and motivation to help them build their skills. Students with moderate anxiety also have room for improvement. In contrast, those with high anxiety could benefit from strategies to help manage

their emotions and use them to strengthen their writing abilities, with attention to their social well-being. To support all students, teachers should implement strategies that alleviate writing anxiety, foster skill development, and cultivate a learning environment that minimizes stress.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that English teachers create a supportive and engaging writing environment that encourages students to express their ideas without fear of criticism or failure. Although writing anxiety was found to have no significant relationship with writing competence, students with high levels of anxiety exhibited lower writing performance than those with moderate anxiety. Thus, teachers should incorporate process-oriented writing activities, collaborative learning, constructive feedback, and opportunities for repeated writing practice to strengthen students' confidence and competence. School administrators should support these initiatives by providing professional development programs that enhance teachers' pedagogical skills in writing instruction and classroom anxiety management. Guidance counselors may also collaborate with language teachers in implementing interventions that promote learners' emotional well-being and self-confidence during writing activities. Students are encouraged to develop regular writing habits, actively participate in classroom writing tasks, and seek feedback to continuously improve their writing skills. Finally, future researchers may replicate this study using larger samples, different educational contexts, or additional variables such as writing self-efficacy, motivation, language proficiency, and instructional strategies to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing writing competence.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest

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