

LINKING ANXIETY IN SECOND LANGUAGE WITH STUDENTS' WRITING PERFORMANCE

Abstract

Language learning anxiety is a specific anxiety reaction that occurs only when a language learner is thinking about language learning, participating in a language class, or studying a language. The study aims to establish the effects of anxiety to the writing performance among the college students of JRMSU System enrolled in English 12 communication class during the second semester of academic year 2015-2016. The correlational research method was employed in the study adapting Cheng English Writing Anxiety Scale (EWAS) and writing performance. The statistical tools used were frequency count, mean computations, t-test, Kruskal-Wallis Test, Mann-Whitney Test, and Spearman Rank. The study reveals that students' language anxiety is moderate and their writing performance is average. Findings reveal that there is a significant relationship between anxiety and students' writing performance. Findings also indicate the statistically significant difference on the writing performance of the respondents as to campus and age, yet there is no significant difference as to sex. However, there is no significant difference on the level of anxiety of the students as to age, sex and campus. This study recommends that instructors should seek more effective ways to ease the anxiety that students might feel when learning and writing in English so as to support successful language learning experiences.

Keywords: *anxiety, second language, writing, language learning, performance*

1.0 Introduction

Anxiety plays a significant role in language learning and communication and is a real challenge in second and foreign language teaching and learning. Language anxiety can manifest as: self-evaluation, excessive concern about failure, concern about what others think, apprehension and worry, avoidance of the target language, careless errors, and excessive studying (Horwitz, 1986 in DeDeyen, 2011). Cubukcu (2007) noted that the students with low self-efficacy have a higher level of anxiety than students with high self-efficacy. Azher, Anwar and Naz (2010) also suggested that speaking in the L2 in front of others heighten students' levels of anxiety, while Naz (2010) pointed out that students also worry about grammatical mistakes, pronunciation and being unable to respond quickly, thus resulting to anxiety.

Foreign language anxiety is situation-specific, because it is mainly related to the specific situation in classroom performances, including listening to the teacher, speaking before the whole class, class quizzes, evaluations by teachers and classmates and apprehension about classroom activities (Di, 2010). Further, Horwitz, 1986 in Choi, 2013 stated that writing anxiety is a "language-skill specific anxiety," which is different from a general classroom type of anxiety. Writing apprehension is a "situation and subject-specific individual difference" and highly apprehensive writers have the tendency to avoid the very activities they need to be successful writers: writing, practicing writing, and getting feedback on writing. As a result, many apprehensive learners end up showing quite poor performances in writing. Daly, 1978 in Choi, 2013 also

mentioned that highly anxious writers produced shorter and less fluent writing than writers with low anxiety.

Language anxiety is more or less present in every person. But we tend not to disclose it in front of everyone. This anxiety is considered to hinder the language learning process and thus it needs to be removed to make language learning relaxed, smooth, easy and interesting. Second Language anxiety is important because it can represent an emotionally and physically uncomfortable experience for some students. If the students are very anxious in class, they are probably not fully engaged or engaged at all. Second language anxiety has been found to have potential negative effects on academic achievement (e.g., lower course grades), cognitive processes (e.g., not being able to produce the language) the social context (e.g., communicating less), and the reaction for the language learner (e.g., traumatic experiences).

Along this context, this study aimed to establish how anxiety affects writing performance among the college students of JRMSU System in English 12 communication class (Communication Arts Skills) during the second semester of the academic year 2015-2016. It also aimed to determine possible sources of anxiety from the learners' perspective, which should provide better understanding of possible obstacles that L2 learners may face during language learning; and determined the significant difference of writing performance as to age, gender and campus. In so doing, research-based findings are established regarding the writing performance of the students to lessen their anxiety, thus improving their writing performance. Results of the study are the basis of the English instructors to shift teaching strategies which are more effective in order to reduce the level of anxiety of the

students. The results provide insights to the instructors in developing writing modules. Moreover, findings of the study give relevance to the writing performance of the students, preparing them to become good writers which will be needed most especially when they are in the actual work. Employees with good writing skill have an edge on their work as much as those who are good in speaking. Writing skill is part of their work. They will need this in preparing business proposals, making reports, developing research and others.

2.0 Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored on the Foreign Language Anxiety of Horwitz and Cope, 1986, in Trang, 2011. Foreign Language Anxiety is a distinct complex constructs of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process. They suggested that foreign language anxiety should be viewed as a situation-specific anxiety arising from the uniqueness of the formal learning of foreign language study, not just a case of general classroom anxiety being transferred to foreign language learning. According to them, no other fields of study implicate self-concept and self-expression to the same degree as foreign language study. The feature makes the anxiety caused by foreign language learning distinctive from other academic anxieties. It is possible that students with general anxiety are likely to experience FLA; however, it is not uncommon to find those who are very good at other subjects frustrated in learning a foreign language. Therefore, there must be something unique to the language learning experience that makes some students anxious.

Language anxiety is attributable to

different causes. The primary sources of language anxiety are explicated by Horwitz, 1986 in Nimat, 2013, are learner characteristics, teacher characteristics, and classroom procedures. Learner characteristics can cause second language anxiety which includes inability to comprehend, self-perceived low level of anxiety, competitiveness, perfectionism, self-awareness, speaking activities, test anxiety, fluent speakers' presence, students' beliefs about language learning, lack of group membership with peers, fear of negative evaluation, negative classroom experiences, etc.

One problem encountered in an English class was directly related to the teachers; that "the teacher was trying to make you feel stupid," and this indicated disrespect on the part of the teacher. A judgmental teaching attitude and a harsh manner of teaching are linked to students' fear in the classroom.

Moreover, classroom procedure was counted as another source of anxiety. Young, 1991 in Nimat, 2013 compiled list of classroom activities which were perceived by students as producing anxiety: spontaneous role-play in the class; speaking in front of the class; oral presentations or skits in front of the class; presenting an unprepared dialogue in front of the class; and writing on the board.

On the other hand, Hassan (2001) pointed out some possible causes of writing anxiety from a linguistic and cognitive perspective, such as poor skill development, inadequate role models, lack of understanding of the composing process, and authoritative, teacher-centered, product-based model of teaching. He stressed that self-confidence is extremely important in determining students' affective response to writing task. In this current study, the majority of the students less often choose to write down their thoughts in English. So in this case they

have less motivation and autonomy to practice writing out of the class

3.0 Methodology

This study utilized a correlational method to determine how foreign language anxiety is related to second language writing among the 158 college students of JRMSU System enrolled in a writing class (Communication Arts/Skills 2) during the Second Semester of Academic Year 2015-2016. A purposive sampling was employed utilizing one English writing class from each campus.

The research instrument of this study was composed of three parts. The first part dealt with the socio-demographic profile of the respondents as to age, gender, and campus.

The second part was an adaptation of Cheng (2004) English Writing Anxiety Scale (EWAS), which was designed for assessing English writing anxiety among students. The EWAS consisted of two sections. The first section had 15 items, each to be rated on a 5-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Are Uncertain, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree which will be interpreted as 1=Not Anxious, 2=Less Anxious, 3=Moderately Anxious, 4=Much Anxious, 5= Very Much Anxious. The second section was an open-ended question that asked the students to explain, from their own perspective, what factors make them nervous when they write in English for class assignments. While individual interviews would have provided more information, there was no opportunity to interview the students; the open-ended question was an alternative measure to find out students' own explanations for their nervousness about English writing.

Part III dealt with the perfor-

mance-based test scores on the free writing of the students. In this free-writing activity, students will choose one topic out of the given five topics to develop a 100-150 word composition. The researcher provided them with the rubric to be used in assessing students' writing. In the rubric, there were four major criteria for assessment: organization and content, linguistic accuracy, fulfilment of the writing task or purposes, and neatness. Each of the first three criteria consisted of four intervals of scores with brief descriptions, while neatness has two intervals, either legible or not. Organization and con-

tent accounted for 10 points and the other three criteria accounted for 5 points each. This suggests that the teacher put more emphasis on content and creativity than linguistic accuracy, reflecting the characteristics of free writing. The following ranges was used (1-5 poor, 6-10 fair, 11-15 average 16-20 above average, 21-25 excellent). Letter requests to the instructors of a writing class in the five campuses were sent. Scores were tallied, tabulated and further analyzed and interpreted using statistical tools: frequency count, percent, mean, T-test, Pearson R.

Table 1. Level of Anxiety of the Respondents

Descriptors	AWM	SD	Description
While writing in English, I'm nervous.	3.7	0.83	Much Anxious
I feel my heart pounding when I write English compositions under time constraint.	3.61	0.82	Much Anxious
While writing English compositions, I feel worried and uneasy if I know they will be evaluated.	3.75	0.99	Much Anxious
I often choose to write down my thoughts in English.	4.98	0.81	Very Much Anxious
I usually do my best to avoid writing English compositions.	2.73	1.13	Moderately Anxious
My mind often goes blank when I start to work on an English composition.	2.89	0.92	Moderately Anxious
I don't worry that my English compositions are a lot worse than others.	2.80	0.94	Moderately Anxious
I tremble or perspire when I write English compositions under time pressure.	3.43	0.99	Moderately Anxious
If my English composition is to be evaluated, I would worry about getting a very poor grade.	3.74	0.97	Moderately Anxious
I do my best to avoid situations in which I have to write in English	3.01	1.09	Moderately Anxious
My thoughts become jumbled when I write English compositions under time constraint.	3.37	0.99	Moderately Anxious
Unless I have no choice, I would not use English to write compositions.	2.66	1.03	Moderately Anxious
I often feel panic when I write English compositions under time constraint.	3.05	1.11	Moderately Anxious
I'm afraid that the other students would think my English composition was terrible if they read it.	3.25	1.08	Moderately Anxious
I freeze up when unexpectedly asked to write English compositions.	2.94	0.94	Moderately Anxious
I would do my best to excuse myself if asked to write English compositions.	2.45	1.01	Less Anxious
I don't worry at all about what other people would think of my English composition.	3.36	0.98	Moderately Anxious
I usually seek every possible chance to write English compositions outside of class.	3.21	0.99	Moderately Anxious
I usually feel my whole body rigid and tense when I write English compositions.	2.81	0.97	Moderately Anxious
I'm afraid of my English composition being chosen as a sample for discussion in class.	3.07	1.07	Moderately Anxious
I'm not afraid at all that my English compositions would be rated as very poor.	2.84	1.19	Moderately Anxious
Whenever possible, I would use English to write compositions.	3.89	0.84	Much Anxious
GRAND MEAN	3.21	0.49	Moderately Anxious

Table 1 presents the level of anxiety of the respondents. As shown on the table, the respondents obtained an average weighted mean of 3.21 which is described as neither anxious nor not anxious. The ta-

ble further shows that the respondents were very much anxious in choosing to write down their thoughts in English and were less anxious on doing their best to excuse themselves if asked to write English com-

positions. This means that the students of JRMSU had experience anxiety but not that much. The findings contrasted the study of Numaya (2013) in which the results revealed that students' anxiety affects their four skills of language in which speaking anxiety is the highest above all.

This implies that language teachers may engage students in writing workshops that can help them improve their disposition and probably reduce their level of writing anxiety. A positive disposition does not necessarily mean that the student will be good

writers but future researchers can focus on the contents of writing workshops that can help students overcome difficult moments during the writing process.

According to Choi (2013), students with less English writing anxiety are expected to have better grades on their writing portfolios than students with more English writing anxiety, because highly anxious students are not expected to produce lengthy or fluently written pieces, due to their lack of confidence or their tendency to avoid writing.

Table 2. Writing Performance of the Respondents

Criteria	Mean	Standard Deviation	Description
Organization & Content	5.88	1.91	Average
Linguistic accuracy	2.28	0.99	Fair
Fulfilment of the writing task or purpose	2.51	1.02	Fair
Neatness	2.38	1.22	Fair
AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	13.02	4.26	AVERAGE

Table 2 presents the writing performance of the respondents along with the four criteria. As shown on the table, the respondents got an average level of writing performance. This means that the writers put more emphasis on content and creativity than linguistic accuracy, reflecting the characteristics of free writing.

The table further shows that out of the four criteria, the respondents got the lowest mean on linguistic accuracy. On content and organization, the respondents were average which means that their writing is not coherent and consistent frequently, and only lists information. On linguistic accuracy, fulfilment of the writing task or purpose, and neatness, the respondents performed fairly which means that there are over 10 grammatical mistakes or misspellings, writings were relevant to the topic but

with falling short of expected amount of writing, and illegible handwriting and irritating smudges.

Dally and Miller (2012) had examined the negative impact of a high level of writing anxiety on performance, and found that those who experienced low anxiety tended to be successful in the writing test. This test was run on more than 2500 students at a Midwestern University. Moreover, Dally and Miller indicated that apprehensive writers tended to be less successful and less willing to sign up for future, advanced writing courses.

However, Al-Ahmad (2003) argued that writing anxiety was a challenging experience for both L1 and L2 learners, and consequently it negatively affected their writing practices. For SL learners, it was shown to be even more challenging, since

the language was systematically different from their native language. This implies that writing is a demanding activity especially for learners of a second/foreign lan-

guage and writing apprehension is a real problem facing ESL/EFL students' apprehension, and something should be done to reduce students' apprehension".

Table 3. Sources of Students' English Writing Anxiety

Sources of Anxiety	Frequency	Percent
Fear of committing grammatical mistakes	92	57.5%
Negative Evaluation	34	21.25%
Insufficient knowledge on the topic	25	15.6%
Other Sources	9	5.6%
Total	160	100%

Table 3 presents the sources of the respondents' anxiety on second language writing. Of the students' comments in response to the open-ended question at the end of the survey questionnaire, more than half (57.5%) were related to the fact that students were afraid that they might make grammatical mistakes in English writing. This source of anxiety is reflected in the following responses:

I am afraid that I might make grammatical mistakes in English writing (1)

Grammar rules are too difficult to memorize (2)

I am not sure if my sentences are ungrammatical or not (3)

I am not good in observing subject-verb agreement (4)

The second most reported source of anxiety is negative evaluation (21.25%). This source of anxiety is reflected in the following responses:

I am afraid that when my classmates can read my writing they will laugh at my mistakes (5)

I feel shy to express my idea because I

know my teacher will read it. (6)

I feel nervous every time I write in English because I am afraid my grammar will be evaluated. (7)

The teacher might get angry because I can't write well in English even if I'm already in college. (8)

The third most common reason that the students gave was lack of knowledge regarding the topic (15.6%). This source of anxiety is reflected on the following responses:

I don't have much idea on the topic. (9)

The topic is not familiar to me. (10)

I don't have much knowledge on the topic. (11)

Sometimes I am out of the topic because of the number of words required. (12)

The "other" category comprised a mixed category (5.6%) and offered many interesting insights. For example, one of the students revealed the lack of confidence in writing. Another student stated his or her unwillingness to write in English, attributing it to lack of vocabulary. One student responded on the short time given in writing.