



## RESEARCH PAPER

### Investigating Factors Causing English Writing Anxiety among Undergraduate Students of Balochistan, Pakistan

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#### ABSTRACT

One of the primary skills of language is writing which has a significant impact on students' academic achievement, particularly in Pakistani education system. Students experience various levels and types of anxiety while writing an academic English essay, which could affect their performance negatively. In order to determine the reasons of writing anxiety of SBKWU's BS students, the current research study focuses on examining the types and levels of writing anxiety among Baluchistan undergraduate students. This quantitative study's theoretical foundation was the Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) hypothesis of language anxiety. The participants of the study included 100 SBK Women University Quetta undergraduate students. Two groups – 50 students randomly chosen from BS first semester and 50 students from BS eighth semester at University in Balochistan, Pakistan. The questionnaire used was modified from (Cheng, 2004) and the data was evaluated through SPSS. The study's findings demonstrated that first-semester students experience greater anxiety, heart palpitations, mental blankness, and shivering when they start writing. There was a fear of receiving bad grade, panic attacks, avoidance of situations, and their thoughts became confused when they wrote in English.

**KEYWORDS** English as a Foreign Language (FLA), English as a Second Language (ESL), Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), Writing Apprehension Test (WAT)

#### Introduction

Since Researchers and academics have long recognised the link between anxiety and learning of second/foreign language. According to Brindley and Schneider (2002), writing ability is the most crucial to students' success out of the four key language skills. Writing is a sophisticated skill that requires effort and comparing writing to other language skills is not an easy task (Shawis, 2009). A lot of emphasis is put on writing ability in Pakistani educational institutions because of which students experience English writing anxiety, which requires serious attention (Khan, 2009). The majority of students' issues with writing in English are related to anxiety-related factors that make it difficult for students to create well-written and well-composed writing samples in classrooms. Once of the reasons of students' writing anxiety have been identified, it will be feasible to reduce it by offering them with pertinent learning methods (Öztürk & Eçen, 2007). Lack of writing proficiency increases the likelihood of severe anxiety in students, which affects their academic performance negatively (Clark, 2004).

The intensity of English writing anxiety's pervasiveness can be further comprehended as it has also been observed among English native speakers in addition to ESL/EFL students. The Writing Apprehension Test (WAT), for instance, was administered at a Midwestern University by Daly (1978) to twenty-five hundred undergraduates. This research study revealed that the higher prevalence of anxiety felt by native English speakers while composing a writing sample had a detrimental effect on test results. Writing assignments are undoubtedly more difficult for ESL/EFL students than for native English speakers, and L1 students are less likely than L2 students to display writing anxiety because their primary language is systematically different from English. This study specifically examines the reasons of English writing anxiety in Baluchistan while keeping in mind the general frequency of writing anxiety among students.

## Literature Review

### Anxiety

Cheng (2004) defined a multidimensional understanding of anxiety and its effects on language learners. His three dimensional analysis of writing anxiety included somatic anxiety, nervousness and suspense psychological anxiety, and withdrawal and avoidance-related behavioral anxiety. Sparks, Ganschow, and Javorsky (2000) also assert that poor performance is created by students' cognitive impairments, and this inadequate performance changes into worry. Moreover, gender was also found to be the cause of the writing anxiety; some studies find men to experience less anxiety as compared to women for instance, Herrington, Matheny, Curlette, McCarthy & Penick (2005) while Zorbaz (2010) concludes otherwise and proves that men complaints more about facing anxiety while working on a written composition than women. Writing anxiety is directly proportionate to the increase in the language difficulty (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Schweiker-Marra & Marra, 2000). Anxiety may affect performance in a way that is both beneficial and detrimental (Lehrer, Goldman, & Strommen, 1990; Alpert & Haber, 1960). As a result, it is vital to the writing abilities of EFL students and presents some of the greatest challenges in the teaching of languages, although on occasion, some anxiety is desirable for increased attention and accuracy on the part of the students in their writing performance. Previous studies (e.g. Young, 1991; Aida, 1994; Macintyre & Gardner, 1994) suggest that anxiety impact ESL education negatively thus it becomes critically important to prohibit anxiety, however, Brown's (2007) work proved that anxiety might actually help people performing their job better. Expanding on Brown's (ibid) work Negari, et, al. (2012) asserts that participants of any learning activity may perform better if they are stressed.

Low competence and poor performance can both be caused by a lack of vocabulary and language experience, which can also cause anxiety. Furthermore, lack of vocabulary and experience make pupils feel more anxious when writing, which contributes to writing anxiety. As a result, anxiety has an impact on learning, supporting the link between writing anxiety and effectiveness.

### Types of Anxiety

Anxiety is produced when a person questions his capacity to handle the stress (Bishop, Holm, Borowiak, and Wilson (2001). Many studies have been performed to trace the development of anxiety in stressful situation such as exams, a sport competition or even a simple classroom activity (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986). According to Deffenbacher (1977), anxiety is made up of four different elements: anxiety, *cognitive* and *somatic* anxiety and escape/avoidance. *Somatic* anxiety highlights the bodily aspects of the anxious experiences, Moris et al (1981) mentions that this nervousness and fear can add to

tension. Cognitive anxiety is described as the logical component of anxiety that includes performance anxiety, negative expectations and worry over how others will see you while *cognitive* or *mental* expressions of anxiety, *somatic anxiety* manifests itself in a physical way. A person when anxious may present both physical and cognitive symptoms of anxiety. However, anxiety is often characterized by one of these two categories of symptoms. *Somatic* anxiety may have physical symptoms like headache, muscle tension, numbness etc. while *cognitive* anxiety shows the symptoms like fear, uneasiness, difficulty concentrating.

### **Self-efficacy and Anxiety in a Foreign Language English Setting**

Self-efficacy has continued to be a major factor in success in English language acquisition/learning in recent times and has received widespread attention. In 2013, Hetthou and Toe carried out an intriguing study with the goal of determining the relationship between writing practices and self-efficacy. It also hypothesized as whether the overall, writing efficacy can be used as a good indicator for students' performance. Participants of this study were required to write a particular difficult paragraph. The findings demonstrated a strong positive correlation between writing self-efficacy and writing practices.

While anxiety in an EFL classroom is a very significant topic, which demands a lot of attention from researchers as many of its aspects are still under-researched. A study conducted by Ozturk & Saydam (2014) suggested that gender, proficiency of students in their target language and their length of contact to the target language impacts writing anxiety. This study examined two emotional components in a setting of EFL: anxiety and self-efficacy. The students, who studied 1<sup>st</sup> year English at eight colleges, were chosen. Whereas each student came to the university with a different background in language teaching, they all began a necessary platform for language learning in their 1<sup>st</sup> year there. The participants were selected by a random selection method. This study used a mixed approach as its method to closely review the subjects' levels of anxiety and self-efficacy. For the quantitative part, the Second Language Writing Anxiety Instrument (SLWAI, Cheng, 2004) and the English Writing Self-Efficacy Scale were utilised (EWSS, Cheng, 2004). The findings of the quantitative part revealed female students were having higher level of anxiety as compare to males. Qualitative results showed that learners suffered more writing anxiety, there was lack of knowledge of vocabulary, fear of negative evaluation not having abilities to generate new ideas.

The careful literature review regarding writing anxiety discovered an under researched area i.e. to determine the elements that cause writing anxiety. This study not only assists teachers in determining the elements that contribute to their students' writing anxiety but it will also be helpful in developing the strategies that would assist students to overcome their anxiety.

### **Material and Methods**

SBKWU Baluchistan, undergraduate students made up the study's population. The research technique used was quantitative. The research tools included a questionnaire which was analysed using SPSS. The questionnaire was modified from Cheng's (2004) survey on second-language writing anxiety (SLWAI). 22 questions made up the questionnaire for assessing how much ESL writing anxiety SBKWU undergraduate students experience. The SLWAI creative type was created by Cheng (2004) and measures a learner's level of interest in L2 writing. It has been used in numerous investigations (e.g. Zhang, 2011; Genc, 2019; Kusumaingputri, 2018) that are related to composing in a second language fear. The SLWAI comprises of twenty-two entries, each of which is marked on a

5-point Likert scale. The SLWAI's 22 elements were separated into 3 complex variables, including:

- Cognitive Anxiety (ca)
- Avoidance Behavior (ab)
- Somatic Anxiety (sa)

In the survey, respondents were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In ESL, a higher score denotes a greater degree of writing anxiety. High levels of writing anxiety are indicated by total scores above 65, low levels by total scores below 50, and moderate levels by total scores falling in the middle.

### Sample Size

Two groups included the study's sample: (a) 50 randomly chosen BS 1<sup>st</sup> semester students at SBK Women's University Quetta. (b) 50 students from the SBK Women's University Quetta's BS 8<sup>th</sup> semester who were chosen at random.

### Data Collection

To collect information and determine the findings, questionnaires were distributed amongst the chosen sample.

### Results and Discussion

The data was analyzed through SPSS. Descriptive statistics were employed to examine 100 students' responses to investigate the levels and types of the fear that is developed as a result of writing practice among BS 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Semester students at a Balochistan university, Pakistan. The findings of the investigation were examined through descriptive statistics throughout the data interpretation process.

**Table 1**  
**SLWAI Study Using Descriptive Statistics of SBKWU Undergraduates**

	Students	Min anxiety	Max anxiety	Mean
Low Anxiety	58	33	55	44
High Anxiety	42	68	101	84.5
<b>Total</b>	100	22	110	66

The statistical analysis of Table 1 traces that anxiety level in the participants of study range from 22-110. Since the mean score is 66 so anyone scoring above 66 has high level of anxiety, 48 % of the population scored above 66, thus showing high level of anxiety. 58 % of study population scored between 55-33, hence showing low anxiety.

Tables 2 and 3 below show the results of descriptive statistics for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> semesters separately.

**Table 2**  
**Anxiety Level of 1<sup>st</sup> semester**

	Students	Min anxiety	Max anxiety	Mean
Low anxiety	12	47	64	55.5

<b>High anxiety</b>	38	67	92	79.5
<b>Total</b>	50	47	92	69.5

Table 2 specifically reflects the highest and lowest anxiety level in 1<sup>st</sup> semester students. 38 % of 1<sup>st</sup> semester students reported suffering from high level of writer's anxiety while their anxiety ranged from 47 to 92 with 69.5 computed mean. This result reveals that 1<sup>st</sup> semester students not only suffer from anxiety but their anxiety level is higher than any other group. Another important finding that this table reflects is that even the group students who showed low level of anxiety; their score did not drop below 47 depicting that their anxiety level remains moderate and not low.

**Table 3**  
**Anxiety Level of 8<sup>th</sup> semester**

	Students	Min anxiety	Max anxiety	Mean
<b>Low Anxiety</b>	46	33	64	48.5
<b>High Anxiety</b>	4	67	101	83.5
<b>Total</b>	50	33	101	67

There were 50 students enrolled in the 8<sup>th</sup> semester, according to the table above. Descriptive statistics were used to determine their degree of anxiety. The lowest degree of anxiety that a participant experienced was 33 in the 8<sup>th</sup> semester, whereas the highest level was 101. As a result, the 8<sup>th</sup> semester's anxiety ranged from 33 to 101 and the average value was 67. The highest level of high anxiety was 101, and it affected 4% of the 8<sup>th</sup> semester students. The participants who suffered from high level anxiety was 67 while 46% of 8<sup>th</sup> semester students reported low levels of anxiety i.e. 33.

**Table 4**  
**Descriptive statistics for SBKWU undergraduate students in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> semesters.**

	Type	ca	sa	ab
8 <sup>th</sup> sem.	Mean	2.2000	2.1943	2.1743
	N	50	50	50
	Std. Deviation	.71384	.74971	.56504
1 <sup>st</sup> sem.	Mean	3.7450	3.8800	2.2571
	N	50	50	50
	Std. Deviation	.55095	.69947	.73752
Total	Mean	2.9725	3.0371	2.2157
	N	100	100	100
	Std. Deviation	1.00261	1.11263	.65497

This study bore interesting results about the writing anxiety in the students who are new to university such as 1<sup>st</sup> semester and the students who have spent considerable time (4 years) in the university such as 8<sup>th</sup> semester. A comparison between students anxiety level confirms that new students i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> semester experience more *somatic anxiety* (MS=3.7450, SD=.55095) while senior students who are in 8<sup>th</sup> semester reported higher levels of *cognitive anxiety*. (MS=2.2000, SD=.71384)

While 1<sup>st</sup> semester students reported higher level of *somatic anxiety* (MS=3.8800, SD=.69947) their overall anxiety level remain higher than the 8<sup>th</sup> semester students (MS=2.1943, SD=.74971). *Avoidance Behavior* result showed that awareness about the nature of assignment, credit or not, raised the anxiety level of 1<sup>st</sup> semester students (MS=2.2571, SD=.73752) however, it did not have any impact on students from 8<sup>th</sup> semester (MS=2.1743, SD=.56504). Similarly, 1<sup>st</sup> semester students reported that they feel numbness

and dizziness while working on English composition while 8<sup>th</sup> semester students reported low anxiety levels while working on the assignment.

Another element that impact the anxiety levels in 1<sup>st</sup> semester students was the knowledge of others doing better than them. According to this study, 1<sup>st</sup> semester students continuously compare their work with others and fearing that they may score lower than the rest. 1<sup>st</sup> semester students tend to use more delaying and avoidances tactics as compared to students studying in 8<sup>th</sup> semester when asked to write an English composition. While, 1<sup>st</sup> semester students feel more stressed and frightened that their work will be shared with their class fellows, the 8<sup>th</sup> semester students stayed relatively calm.

## **Conclusions**

The study's findings suggest that undergraduate students at SBK University Quetta in both semesters experienced varying degrees and kinds of writing anxiety but 1<sup>st</sup> semester students experienced the issue to a larger extent than 8<sup>th</sup> semester students. When they realized that their writing would be evaluated and they expected to receive low grades, 1<sup>st</sup> semester students felt more anxious, worried, and uneasy. In contrast, 8<sup>th</sup> semester students felt less anxious in this scenario. The 1<sup>st</sup> semester students became more confused when writing in English under time pressure. They felt more anxious and concerned that their English compositions are much worse than others. When given a deadline for writing an English composition, students from both classes experienced anxiety. Moreover, 8<sup>th</sup> semester students who knew their writing would be graded felt less anxious than the 1<sup>st</sup> semester students while writing an English composition. Compared to the 8<sup>th</sup> semester students, 1<sup>st</sup> semester students tend to avoid writing their ideas down in English. Students during both semesters experienced anxiety when composing in English. When asked if they typically avoid any chances to compose English compositions outside of class, both groups accepted with a very slight difference. According to all of the results, students in both semesters struggled with writing anxiety but first semester undergraduates have more tendency to be fearful, anxious and unnerved than eighth semester students while composing a writing sample in English.

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