EFL Students' Perceptions of the Causes of Scientific Writing Anxiety

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Abstract

The study was aimed at investigating the levels of scientific writing anxiety and describing the students' perceptions of the causes of scientific writing anxiety. This research used mixed-method with explanatory sequential as a research design. The students in fifth-semester of English Education IAIN Palangka Raya from 4 classes were involved as the subject of the research. The data was obtained by distributing 51 closed-ended questionnaires and by interviewing 6 participants. The result showed the majority level of writing anxiety is high level with 34 of 51 students or 70.5% students that experienced high level of writing anxiety. In addition, the result also revealed that time constraints, language difficulties, a lack of experience or insufficient writing practice, fear of failure, received negative evaluation from the teacher and classmates were the most significant factors causing students to feel anxious when writing scientific papers.

Keywords: EFL Students' Perceptions; Scientific Writing; Writing Anxiety

Introduction

In university realm, students need to master four skills in learning English as a foreign language such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the case of productive skills such as writing, students assume that writing also the highest difficultly skill both in the mother tongue and in ESL/EFL (Wahyuni and Umam, 2017). In fact, students in educational settings are expected to be writing expert because students must complete assignments such as working on research project, thesis, and dissertation. Therefore, students must pay closer attention to the scientific style of writing as well as the more complex aspects of writing.

The complexity of the process in the scientific style of writing tends to make

students' have psychological problems such as anxiety. It happens when the teacher checks the students' writing or when the teacher makes the students under time pressure their mind becomes blank (Zhang, 2011). Therefore, anxiety becomes one of the factors which influence the learning process in writing English. In line with Al-Sawalha and Chow (2012) explained that anxiety in writing is one or more feelings, attitutes, or action that affect the students ability to begin, work on or complete a specific writing job. Anxiety in writing makes students avoid writing because students are worried about grammar and the assessment of their writing.

In the correlation study conducted by Miri and Joia (2018) exploring the perceived students experienced writing anxiety of five Afghan English Language Majors, its results showed the major reason behind students writing anxiousness was students' little exposure to writing activities. Jawas (2019) in her study tried to identified factors that contribute in students' writing anxiety experienced and students' strategies to solve it. The result of the study showed the most dominant factors of writing anxiety was essay writing that must be finished in the classroom, and for the strategies to manage students' writing anxiety was the collaborative works in pairs or small groups for developed idea while writing and essay construction. Bastug et al (2016) tried to found out the causes, the impact, and the process of writer's block experiences by a group of classroom. A phenomenological design was used with qualitative approach and focus group for the interview. As the result found students experience writing anxiety when writing composition in a classroom with limited time during the exam, when writing informative texts, and when writing a poem. The causes of writing anxiety are because fear of providing incorrect content, lack of knowledge about the topic, and lack of ability to organize the information. In a similar study, Wahyuni and Umam (2017) investigated the levels, dominant types, and main factors of writing anxiety. The findings revealed that 54% of students had high levels of writing anxiety, while 44% had moderate levels of writing anxiety, and the most common type of writing anxiety was cognitive anxiety and there are also four major causes of writing anxiety, including a lack of time, less writing practice, linguistic challenges, and concern about a negative comments from the teacher.

The researcher conducted the research with several similarities and differences from previous researches. This research tried to fill some gaps not explored yet from the previous researches. Most studies investigated general style of writing such as level, causes and strategies in writing. This study provided more specific style of writing based on the students perspective. The study was conducted in IAIN Palangka Raya with fifth-semester students from English Education study program. The aims of this study to investigated students' types of writing anxiety and to describe what students think about the factor that causes their anxiety in Scientific Writing. Understanding students' perceptions about their experienced in writing anxiety will assist students, lecturers, and English teacher to find out a better strategies to use, apply effective method to teach, handle, solve the students anxiety

in writing during writing process in classroom. Therefore these aims are formulated in the research questions : (1) What are the levels of writing anxiety among EFL students in the fifth-semester. (2) How are the students' perceptions of the causes of their Scientific Writing anxiety.

Method

This study used mixed-method with explanatory sequential as a research design. According to Creswell (2012), a mixed-method study is one in which the researcher gathers and analyze data, integrates findings, and make conclusion. This research data is both quantitative and qualitative. The questionnaire responses for research question number one are incorporated into quantitative data. The interview data from the subject of investigation is used address research question two. The subject of this study was 5th semester students of English Education study program in IAIN Palangka Raya. There were 4 classes (A,B,C and D) involved in this study. Two instruments were used in this study. The first one was Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) by Cheng (2004) which is a 22-item questionnaires to measure students' level of anxiety in writing English. The distribution of items categorized into subscales namely with the same aspects as Somatic anxiety (negative feelings), Cognitive anxiety (negative expectation and preoccupation), and Avoidance Behaviour (avoidance in writing) with three subcategories of items is as follows Somatic anxiety (2,6,8,11,13,15,19), Cognitive anxiety (1,3,7,9,14,17,20,21), Avoidance Behavior (4,5,10,12,16,18). The questionnaire used likert scale 5 choice response with format 5 (Strongly Agree), 4 (Disagree), 3 (Undecided), 2 (Disagree), 1 (Strongly Disagree). According to Zhang (2011) suggested that five items of the questionnaire (1,4,17,18,22) were negatively worded and reversely scorded before being summed up with adjusting the values assigned from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" so that response "Strongly Disagree" received score 5 instead of 1. To measure students' level of writing anxiety with a total score >65 (high level), 50-65 (moderate level) and <50 (low level) (Zhang, 2011).

The second instrument was interview. An interview was administered to 6 students (2 randomly selected students from each levels of anxiety). The interview used semi-structured interview and the questions are related to students' perceptions of the causes of their scientific writing anxiety adopted by Miri and Joia (2018). In this study, for collecting the questionnaire data gathered with google form and recording the interview process face to face with the interviewees. The collected data questionnaire was analyze using Microsoft excel and interview data was analyze with three steps; data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing verification develop by Miles and Huberman (2014).

Results

Students' Levels of Writing Anxiety

The results displayed on below tables are based on the total summed up each

items of the questionnaire to find out the students' levels of writing anxiety. The data analysis is presented as follows:

Table 1.   Students' Level of Writing Anxiety

Students	Total Score	Level of Anxiety
S1	98	High
S2	96	High
S3	90	High
S4	86	High
S5	85	High
S6	83	High
S7	83	High
S8	81	High
S9	78	High
S10	78	High
S11	76	High
S12	76	High
S13	76	High
S14	75	High
S15	74	High
S16	74	High
S17	74	High
S18	74	High
S19	74	High
S20	74	High
S21	73	High
S22	73	High
S23	73	High
S24	73	High
S25	72	High
S26	72	High
S27	71	High
S28	70	High
S29	69	High
S30	69	High
S31	68	High
S32	67	High
S33	66	High

S34	66	High
S35	66	High
S36	66	High
S37	65	Moderate
S38	65	Moderate
S39	63	Moderate
S40	63	Moderate
S41	63	Moderate
S42	63	Moderate
S43	57	Moderate
S44	57	Moderate
S45	56	Moderate
S46	55	Moderate
S47	55	Moderate
S48	54	Moderate
S49	54	Moderate
S50	50	Moderate
S51	42	Low

The result of the questionnaire presented the analysis of students' levels of writing anxiety in Scientific Writing subject. Furthermore, the table showed that from 51 students 36 or 70.5% students were indicated had high level of anxiety in writing English. It means that most of the students felt anxious while writing English in scientific style of writing or (in) scientific writing subject. In addition, the table showed that from 51 students 14 or 27.4% students were indicated had moderate level of anxiety in writing English. It shows that 14 students sometimes felt anxious while writing English in scientific style. Moreover, the table also showed only 1 students from 51 students that have low level anxiety in writing English. It can concluded that the dominant levels of writing anxiety that students have is high level.

This results, are similar to (Wahyuni & Umam, 2017; Kabigting et al, 2020) who found the majority more than 50% of their participants had high writing anxiety score. In my context of study, the majority of the students had high anxiety writing score which valued more than 70% and the other results are moderate level and low anxiety.

Students' Perceptions of   The Causes of Scientific Writing Anxiety

The findings were presented with the analysis of the data collected which students' perceptions of the causes of scientific writing anxiety. After knowing the finding of the students' level of writing anxiety. The following questions of the interview related to the students opinion and experience about the causes of writing anxiety that they face in scientific writing based on each dominant level which is

high anxiety and moderate anxiety. Therefore, to answered the research question, the study employed open interview to the respondents. There were six questions, dialing with the first question, the respondents gave responses as follows:

a. *The first question, have you ever felt nervous when starting to write in English?*

High Level	Moderate Level
S2 : *"Often."* S8 : *"It often happens."* S15 : *"Sometimes."*	S40 : *"Sometimes."* S44 : *"Often."* S50 :*"Yes, but it depends on the situation."*

Based on the answer of the question, the researcher found mostly students in high and moderate level of anxiety felt nervous when starting to write in English, it happens sometimes and even often that depends on the situation.

b. *Second question, why do you have anxiety in writing English?*

High Level	Moderate Level
S2 : *"Afraid of being wrong in front of my friends, afraid of wrong grammar, and sentence structure."* S8 : *"The situations during exams and limited time, if the deadlines is long, it's not a problem."* S15 : *"Fear of writing in English, afraid of wrong grammar, afraid of not understanding."*	S40 : *"I am more afraid of making mistakes in the aspect of writing such as grammar."* S44 : *"If the topic has been determined and I haven't mastered the topic, but if the topic is free, then I will do it best on my ability."* S50 : *"During the exam, I will definitely be anxious because I am afraid that I will not have enough time to do it, plus a test supervisor, such as monitoring our movements that will continue trigger my anxiety, but if the situation via online and the time to collect it is long, it will reduce my anxiety."*

Based on the students' answer, the researcher found there is no different between high and moderate level of anxiety. The students have anxiety in writing

English because they are afraid making mistakes or wrong grammar, limited time, being wrong in front of friends, and unfamiliar topic of writing that has been determined.

c. Is there any factor that causing your anxiety in writing?

High Level	Moderate Level
S2 : *"First, it's from myself, I am an introvert, when my friends laughed at me because my writing is bad, it makes me felt anxious."* S8 : *"For the internal factor, for example from myself, because the lack of vocabulary, lack of practice and lack of reading as well and for external factor such as noise interference or from neighbors because my class is online and practice at home."* S15 : *"Afraid of being wrong, afraid of being corrected by lecturer, for example, afraid of being embarrassed because we already a students and still can't do the writing."*	S40 : *"Yes, the external factor, for example, is that we are given an hour, so we don't have enough time."* S44 : *"In the past, I was actually traumatized by school because I had participated in the English writing Olympiad and the time was short, the results weren't good, so it's been like that until now."* S50 : *"For example, during the exam, the first example is because of the time limit, secondly there is a lack of vocabulary. If the study was online, it's better because I can still find references from the internet. If offline is more difficult, namely lack of vocabulary, time, makes me become more panic."*

From the script of interview above, the result found that students felt more anxious because the limited time of writing especially during exam, lack of vocabulary, practice and reading related about the topic, evaluated and corrected by lecturer in front of other students, and the distraction from neighbors during online class. It can concluded that students mostly have anxious because the limited time during writing in English.

d. *How does writing anxiety affect the result of your writing?*

High Level	Moderate Level
S2 : *"I just write what I feel and put it in written form."* S8 : *"Mostly the result of my writing is not as expected, because the lack of grammar."* S15 : *"The result of writing is different with what I expected, So, it makes me can't develop my writing skills because of anxiety."*	S40 : *"What is certain is that, for sure, because of a panic my writing score was unsatisfied."* S44 : *"Sometimes good sometimes bad."* S50 : *"Definitely doesn't match expectations because I'm afraid that for example the results of my writing will be evaluated ."*

Based on the students' answer, the students said that they were unsatisfied with the result of their writing, because the lack of grammar, afraid if the result will be evaluated by lecturer. Therefore, it makes the students can't developed their writing skills.

e. *How does writing anxiety affect your writing performance?*

High Level	Moderate Level
S2 : *"If stress affects my writing, it's like the grammar is lacking, it's like it doesn't connect from paragraphs one and two."* S8 : *"Indeed, often it is due to lack of vocabulary and sometimes there are misunderstandings as well as understanding the instructions given."* S15 : *"The impact is even more frightening."*	S40 : *"More blank and the performance is not optimal."* S44 : *"If the process involves a lot of deleting, deleting, blank, doubt myself and ask myself about the grammar correct or not."* S50 : *"From the body that can be seen, it is shaking, excessive sweating, its performance is disrupted, moreover, the previous factor is that the lack of trigger vocabulary around us makes it really destroyed."*

Based on the students' answer, the affect of writing anxiety in their writing performance such as for students in high level of anxiety felt stress during the writing process because the lack of grammar, lack of vocabulary, more frightening, difficult to create supporting sentences, and misunderstanding the instruction of the assignment. For students in moderate level of anxiety, students the process of writing is more complicate because it involves a lot of deleting, doubt of theirself especially about the use of grammar and from the body that indicated anxiety affect the process of writing   that can be seen, it is shaking and excessive sweating.

f. How do you solve those problems?

High Level	Moderate Level
S2 : *"by searching, creating new structure and asking my friend to correct my mistakes."* S8 : *"Maybe it's adapted to a hobby because I like to watch a movie, watch movies that use English and often listen to songs and try to translate them."* S15 : *"Practice to write in English more often or practice to write the structure in writing for example writing essay, increasing vocabulary and learning grammar."*	S40 : *"look for references to topics, check the grammar using dictionary."* S44 : *" Yes, I have. 5 minutes before starting to write in English, I have to take a breath, relax, calm down, and drink water. And if the lecturer told the topic a week before the assignment of writing, I would have read it first, if there is no announcement about the topic, I would do as best as I can."* S50 : *" Because, my biggest factor that makes me anxious while writing in English is the lack of vocabulary. And for increasing my vocabulary, I like to listen to music, and sometimes there is a difference between music in past and now, so if I don't know a word, try checking the dictionary and google translate."*

Based on the students' answer, the students said For students in high level of anxiety, their strategies to solve the anxiety problem with search journal as the references, increase their vocabulary with watch a movie, listen English song and translate the new word, practice to writing in English more often. For students in moderate level of anxiety, the strategies to solve their anxiety problems with, look for references, check grammar, and make their body more relax.

Discussion

The finding revealed that (1) there were 36 of 51 students or 70.5% students had high level of anxiety in writing English, 14 or 27.4% students had moderate level of anxiety, and 1 student that had low level of anxiety. Therefore, it can indicated that the dominant level of writing anxiety in fifth semester students is high level of anxiety. (2) The researcher found most students explained negative perception toward the causes of their scientific writing anxiety. The factors that causes their scientific writing anxiety were time pressure, language difficulties, lack of experience or insufficient writing practice,and   fear of evaluation from the teacher and negative comments from classmates. Therefore, it can be concluded that the major factor that causes students anxiety in writing English was external factor.

Moreover, to support the result of the questionnaire was in line with Wahyuni and Umam (2017), the dominant level of anxiety was   high level of writing anxiety with 27 students (54 %); 22 students (44 %) experienced   moderate level of writing anxiety, and 1 student (2 %) experienced low level of writing anxiety. Furthermore, the interview findings agreed with Zhang (2011) regarding the factors that causes students anxiety in writing which includes language difficulties, a lack of experience or insufficient writing practice, and fear of teacher evaluation.

The finding was in accordance with Jawas (2019) that the students felt anxious every time they had to write with time-restricted assignment that must be done in a time-limited period. Liu & Ni (2015) identified the causes of the English writing anxiety were (1) Limited in vocabulary, (2) lack of English writing practice, (3) Not familiar with the required writing genre that caused them to become anxious. Another researcher, Miri & Joia (2018) explained the factor which contributed to writing anxiety were fear of making mistakes, linguistic difficulties such as grammatical structure and vocabulary and difficulty generating ideas. Moreover, Bastug (2017) found the participants suffer when writing a composition in a certain period of time or during an exam, the lack of sufficient information about the content and fear of providing wrong information. In addition, Sabti et al (2019), fear of making mistakes, being negatively evaluated by teachers and classmates, and some physical symptoms, such as sweating, all contribute to students' writing anxiety. Furthermore, Wahyuni & Umam (2017) the main factor that causes students writing anxiety were time constraints, fear of negative comments, linguistic difficulties and a lack of writing practice.

According to Wahyuni and Umam (2017) explained that linguistic difficulties are the primary cause of writing anxiety because of their lack of linguistic knowledge, such as grammar and vocabulary, the students are anxious while writing in English. It also happens because students while writing English compositions students always translate their writing in Indonesia into English, they do not think directly in English. As a result, it makes students concentrate more on content and organization and producing their anxiety in writing English.

Therefore, students need to overcome their anxiety in writing English with several strategies. According to Liu & Ni (2015) there were several strategies for dealing with anxiety, including comforting themselves, revising the essay repeatedly, continuing to write despite the anxiety, reading other students' essays, and turning to dictionary. In addition, Jawas (2019) identified several strategies that can reduce students' anxiety, including improving background knowledge about the topic, finding supporting sentences that will be relevant with the topic, pausing during the writing process, taking breaks, discussing writing problems with peers, and attempting to stay focused and calm. In the same vein,   Zhang (2011) state that the teacher should help the students to overcome their writing anxiety such as with memorizing and imititation starategies students can be familiar with different topics and genres of English writing. In the process of writing, the teacher should provide students with sufficient information and material as well as adequate opportunities

of guided practice, learning and teaching should neither stand at the level of vocabulary and grammar nor at techniques in dealing with test.

Conclusion

The finding concluded that (1) there were 36 of 51 students or 70.5% students had high level of anxiety in writing English, 14 or 27.4% students had moderate level of anxiety, and 1 student that had low level of anxiety. Therefore, it can indicated that the dominant level of writing anxiety in fifth semester students is high level of anxiety. (2) The researcher found most students explained negative perception toward the causes of their scientific writing anxiety. The factors that causes their scientific writing anxiety identified the following: (1) Time pressure, (2) Language difficulties, (3) Lack of experience or insufficient writing practice, (4) Fear of evaluation from the teacher and fear of negative comments from classmates. Therefore, it can be concluded that major factor that causes students anxiety in writing English was external factor.

Based on the findings of the study shows that majority of students in fifth-semester had high level of anxiety with several primer causes of scientific writing anxiety such as, time pressure, language difficulties, lack of experience or insufficient writing practice, fear of evaluation from the teacher and fear of negative comments from classmates. It would be better if the teacher can use several strategies after known the causes of students' anxiety in writing English. The researcher suggest the next researcher will investigates the factor of students' anxiety in other skills such as listening, speaking, and reading. The researcher also suggest that the next researchers do the study by using other kinds of research method to obtain the accurate result of the research, further research also can be done to find out about level, types, or the causes of students anxiety in another skills in English such as, listening, speaking, and reading.

Acknowledgement

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