Writing Anxiety and Its Impact on EFL Students' Academic Performance: A Qualitative Study in an English Education Program

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Academic writing is an important skill for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, but many still face writing anxiety. This anxiety makes students feel nervous, afraid of making mistakes, and often leads to procrastination or low confidence. The aim of this study was to explore the forms of writing anxiety and to see how a writing program could help reduce it. This research used a qualitative descriptive design with six undergraduate students from the English Education Study Program at a private university in Palembang, Indonesia. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires, classroom observations, reflection notes, and students' essays. The results showed four main forms of writing anxiety: fear of negative evaluation, difficulty starting, lack of confidence in grammar and vocabulary, and avoidance behavior. After joining process writing workshops, peer feedback sessions, and reflective discussions, students became more confident, less anxious, and their essays improved in organization and coherence. The program also encouraged them to collaborate and communicate better with peers. These findings suggest that supportive strategies such as process writing, peer feedback, and reflection are effective in helping EFL students overcome writing anxiety and improve their academic writing. ***How to Cite***: Adawiyah, D., Ghazan, M. D., & Ulandari, W. K. (2025). *Indonesian Language Education and Applied Linguistics Reviews, 1*(2), 74-78

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most essential language skills that university students must master, particularly those who study English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In higher education, writing is not only a medium of communication but also a means of demonstrating critical thinking, presenting logical arguments, and showing mastery of academic knowledge. Compared to listening, speaking, and reading, writing is often considered the most demanding skill because it requires both linguistic accuracy and the ability to organize ideas coherently (Hyland, 2016; Fareed, et al. 2019).

Despite its importance, many EFL students still struggle with academic writing. One of the major psychological barriers is writing anxiety. Writing anxiety refers to feelings of tension, fear, and lack of confidence when students are asked to produce written work in English. Students who suffer from this problem often delay writing tasks, produce incomplete drafts, or submit work with poor quality because of the fear of being evaluated negatively (Zhang, 2019; Al Fadda, 2020). As a result, writing anxiety does not only affect students' academic performance but also reduces their motivation to write and engage actively in learning.

Several studies have shown that writing anxiety significantly impacts EFL learners' writing performance. Horwitz (2017) explains that anxiety can interfere with students' ability to generate ideas and focus on accuracy. Similarly, Wu & Lin (2018) found that students with high writing

anxiety tend to avoid writing and fail to develop their arguments effectively. In the Indonesian context, Putra & Abdullah (2019) reported that EFL students often feel pressured by grammar and vocabulary, which prevents them from expressing ideas freely. These studies confirm that writing anxiety is not only a linguistic problem but also a psychological issue that needs to be addressed through supportive teaching strategies.

Different approaches have been introduced to reduce writing anxiety. Collaborative learning and peer feedback are two strategies that have been proven to build a supportive atmosphere and encourage students to take risks in writing (Bai, 2021; Kurniawati & Yulia, 2022). Process writing, which emphasizes drafting, revising, and editing, also helps students to see writing as a process rather than a one-time product (Hyland, 2019; Zhang & Plonsky, 2021). Reflective practices have also been recommended as a way for students to recognize their progress and reduce their fear of making mistakes (Rahimi & Zhang, 2021). However, most of these studies used quantitative approaches, while only a few have explored students' experiences qualitatively.

The lack of qualitative studies leaves a gap in understanding how students actually experience writing anxiety and how they perceive the strategies used to overcome it. Numbers alone cannot fully capture the emotional aspects of students' struggles. Therefore, qualitative research is needed to provide a deeper insight into students' feelings, reflections, and progress during writing activities.

Based on this rationale, the present study was conducted as part of a community engagement program in an English Education Study Program. The study involved six undergraduate students who voluntarily participated in writing workshops and mentoring sessions. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected from open-ended questionnaires, observations, students' reflection notes, and analysis of their written essays. The purpose of this study was to explore the forms of writing anxiety experienced by EFL students and to describe how mentoring, peer feedback, and process writing could help them reduce anxiety and improve academic writing performance. This study is expected to contribute to the understanding of writing anxiety and provide practical insights for lecturers and students in overcoming this common problem in EFL classrooms.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the forms of writing anxiety experienced by students and to describe how they responded to writing activities in a supportive environment. The qualitative approach was chosen because it made it possible to capture students' authentic feelings, reflections, and behaviors, focusing on descriptive accounts rather than numerical data.

The research took place in the English Education Study Program of a private university in Palembang, Indonesia, as part of a community engagement activity. Six undergraduate students participated voluntarily after being informed of the objectives and procedures. They were selected purposively because they admitted experiencing difficulties and nervousness in writing English. The participants came from different semesters, which provided varied perspectives. Ethical principles were strictly followed, including confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the use of data only for academic purposes.

Data were collected from several sources. An open-ended questionnaire was given at the beginning to explore the students' initial feelings and main causes of anxiety. Classroom observations were conducted during every session to record participation, interaction, and visible signs of confidence or nervousness. Reflection notes written after each meeting provided insights into how students felt and what strategies helped them. Finally, essays written in the workshops were examined qualitatively with a rubric to describe progress in content, organization, grammar, and vocabulary.

The program was carried out over four weeks with two sessions each week. It included process writing workshops, peer feedback, reflective discussions, and a final essay assignment. These activities were designed to help students reduce their anxiety step by step while improving writing skills. The data were analyzed thematically by identifying recurring patterns, such as fear

of evaluation, difficulty starting, and lack of confidence in grammar or vocabulary. Triangulation across questionnaires, reflections, and essays was used to validate the findings. Member checking during reflective discussions also allowed students to confirm or clarify the researcher's interpretations.

3. RESULTS

The findings of this study, collected from questionnaires, observations, reflections, and essays, revealed four main themes of writing anxiety. The first was fear of negative evaluation, where students worried their writing would be judged poorly, causing them to hide drafts or delay tasks. The second was difficulty starting, as some students felt "stuck" when beginning an essay despite having ideas. The third was lack of confidence in grammar and vocabulary, which made students hesitant to write longer texts. Finally, avoidance behavior appeared when students postponed or skipped assignments due to stress. These four themes are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Themes of Writing Anxiety among EFL Students

Theme	Description	Example from Students
Fear of negative evaluation	Anxiety about being judged by lecturers or peers	"I am afraid my essay will be judged as bad."
Difficulty starting writing	Trouble beginning sentences or organizing ideas	"I have ideas but I don't know how to start."
Lack of confidence in language	Low confidence in grammar and vocabulary use	"I don't have enough vocabulary to write well."
Avoidance behavior	Tendency to delay or avoid writing assignments	"Sometimes I postpone writing until the last minute."

Table 1 shows the four main themes of writing anxiety: fear of negative evaluation, difficulty starting, lack of confidence in language use, and avoidance behavior. These themes indicate that writing anxiety affects both students' emotions and their academic performance. After joining the program, students showed positive changes. The process writing approach helped them break tasks into smaller stages, reducing pressure. Peer feedback encouraged collaboration, while reflections increased their confidence. One student noted: *"I used to be afraid to write because I thought my grammar was terrible, but now I feel it is okay to make mistakes as long as I can revise them later."*

Students' essays also improved, becoming more organized and coherent, even though errors remained. Observations confirmed that they became more active, confident, and willing to share ideas. These developments are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Students' Changes Before and After the Program

Aspect	Before the Program	After the Program
Attitude toward writing	Nervous, afraid of mistakes, low confidence	More confident, less afraid of criticism
Starting writing	Frequently stuck, difficulty beginning sentences	Able to plan and start writing step by step
Language use	Limited vocabulary, frequent grammar errors	Wider vocabulary use, errors reduced but still present
Academic writing	Disorganized essays, unclear structure	More coherent essays with clearer organization
Participation	Passive in discussions, hesitant to share drafts	Active in discussions, willing to share drafts

Table 2 showed how students' writing attitudes and performance developed after joining the program. Before the intervention, students often avoided writing, felt insecure about their language use, and struggled to begin tasks. After participating in workshops, peer feedback

sessions, and reflections, they became more confident, more active, and produced essays that were more organized and coherent. This indicates that simple strategies, such as process writing and collaborative learning, were effective in reducing writing anxiety and improving students' academic writing.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that writing anxiety is a serious issue that affects EFL students' academic performance. Four main themes—fear of negative evaluation, difficulty starting, lack of confidence in grammar and vocabulary, and avoidance behavior—explain why students often struggle with writing. These findings align with many previous studies on psychological barriers in second language writing.

The first theme, fear of negative evaluation, highlights students' concern about judgment. This is consistent with Al Fadda (2020), who found that EFL students feel nervous about being evaluated, and with Horwitz (2017), who noted that foreign language anxiety often stems from fear of negative judgment. Zhou & Yu (2022) also identified evaluation pressure as a strong predictor of writing anxiety. This study adds qualitative evidence from Indonesian undergraduates, confirming the same issue locally.

The second theme, difficulty starting writing, reflects psychological blocks that prevent students from turning ideas into words. Wu & Lin (2018) noted that anxious learners often face writer's block. Participants in this study reported similar struggles, which were reduced through process writing workshops. Hyland (2019) and Zhang & Plonsky (2021) argued that process writing helps reduce pressure and provides structure, supporting the findings here.

The third theme, lack of confidence in grammar and vocabulary, is widely discussed in EFL research. Fareed et al. (2019) reported that limited language resources increase anxiety. In this study, students admitted insecurity, but peer feedback helped them realize mistakes could be revised. Rahimi & Zhang (2021) found that collaboration reduces fear and improves accuracy. Bai (2021) also showed that peer feedback lowers anxiety, while Ahmed and Pawar (2023) confirmed peer-assisted learning builds confidence. The last theme, avoidance behavior, shows behavioral impacts of anxiety. Some students delayed or avoided writing, similar to Tien's (2016) findings that anxiety leads to procrastination. Putra & Abdullah (2019) also noted that anxious Indonesian students avoided writing tasks, reducing performance. In this study, avoidance decreased with mentoring and peer support.

The improvements observed after the program highlight the effectiveness of process writing, peer feedback, and reflection. Hyland (2019) and Zhang & Plonsky (2021) emphasized that process writing encourages revision and boosts confidence. Peer feedback helped students become more open, consistent with Bai (2021) and Rahimi & Zhang (2021). Reflection also built self-awareness, supporting Setyowati & Sukmawan (2020) and Rahman & Darmi (2020).From a broader perspective, writing anxiety is not only academic but also social. Students became more collaborative and confident, confirming Kurniawati & Yulia (2022) in Indonesia and Lin & Ho (2019), who showed that peer interaction reduces stress.

In summary, writing anxiety is a complex problem requiring comprehensive strategies. It cannot be solved by grammar practice alone. Lecturers should combine linguistic training with psychological and social support. The experiences of the six participants confirm that process writing, peer feedback, and reflection effectively reduce anxiety and improve performance.

5. CONCLUSION

This study explored the forms of writing anxiety experienced by EFL students and how a community-based program could help them overcome it. Using a qualitative descriptive design with six participants, the study identified four main sources of writing anxiety: fear of negative evaluation, difficulty starting writing, lack of confidence in grammar and vocabulary, and avoidance behavior. These findings show that writing anxiety is a multidimensional issue that affects students' emotions, attitudes, and academic performance.

The study also found that process writing workshops, peer feedback activities, and reflection practices helped students reduce their anxiety and improve their writing. After the program, students became more confident, more willing to share drafts, and produced essays that were more organized and coherent. In addition, the program encouraged collaboration and built a supportive academic community among the participants. The implication of this study is that lecturers should not only teach writing as a technical skill but also address the psychological barriers that students face. Creating a safe and collaborative environment is important to help students write without fear of making mistakes. For students, the findings suggest that engaging in reflective practice and peer feedback can increase confidence and make writing less stressful.

In conclusion, writing anxiety is a challenge that can be reduced through supportive teaching strategies. Although this study involved a small group of students, it provides valuable insight into how qualitative approaches can capture the real experiences of learners. Future studies with larger groups are recommended to strengthen these findings and to explore additional strategies for reducing writing anxiety in EFL classrooms.

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