

## A Study on The Causes and Impacts of Writing Anxiety Among Students at Uhamka

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**Abstract:** This study focuses on investigating the internal and external factors that contribute to writing anxiety among English language students. The reason behind choosing this focus is the high occurrence of anxiety experienced by students during academic writing tasks, which often impacts their confidence and performance. The purpose of this study is to explore the causes of writing anxiety, such as lack of writing experience, negative self-perception, feedback pressure, time constraints, linguistic difficulties, and its psychological impact on students' self-esteem. The research was conducted at the English Education Study Program of UHAMKA. Eight students who had completed academic writing courses were selected as participants using purposive sampling. This study used a qualitative research method. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which were based on prepared question categories addressing both internal and external factors. The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify patterns and key themes related to writing anxiety. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for educators to understand students' challenges better and help reduce anxiety in the writing process.

**Keywords:** *writing anxiety, EFL students, internal factors, external factors, academic writing*

### INTRODUCTION

Writing anxiety related to the English Language is one of the most common problems of learners, which hinders academic performance and standardized testing. Writing anxiety, which refers to the nervousness associated with writing tasks, differs in severity and can interfere with students' ability to write effectively. This often leads to reduced self-confidence and poorer academic performance. The issue is particularly prominent among University student in East Jakarta, as challenges in academic writing hinder their capacity to produce organized and coherent English text- an essential skill for academic and professional success. As one of the top countries sending students overseas for education, Jakarta sees a high volume of University applicants. Writing is also one of the most important skills in language learning, and it should be mastered by English Learners. At the university level is essential to have this kind of competence for writing because it will improve students' coherent capability. University-level writing is formal and distinct from personal or creative writing. Academic or Scientific writing is characterized by its clarity, objectivity, structured format, and impersonal tone. It also incorporates a referencing system and avoids the use of first-person perspectives.

In the English Foreign Learner writing classes at the English Department of UHAMKA, it has been observed that student of English students are still struggling with writing essay skills. This is evident from their behavior during lessons and their performance on writing tasks. Many students appear anxious about writing, a condition referred to as writing anxiety. This term describes a range of emotions, attitudes, or behaviors that hinder an individual's ability to start, continue, or complete a writing task, even when they possess the necessary cognitive skills to do. This study focuses on anxiety, which is recognized as a major factor influencing academic achievement. Research has explored anxiety in connection with the four core English language skills: speaking, reading, listening, and writing.

Studies about students' writing anxiety have grown in great numbers and have been applied in various contexts. Numerous studies provide strong evidence that writing anxiety among students remains a significant issue, especially for undergraduate English majors, as it can impact their academic writing abilities. In social psychological research, a key focus has been on applying writing anxiety theory to understand the different types of writing anxiety within academic settings.

While the majority of empirical research highlights the detrimental effects of anxiety on both the learning process overall and individual performance specifically, various factors have been identified as triggers of anxiety. These include linguistic challenges, limited writing practice, low confidence in writing abilities, and test-related fears. Such factors are considered key contributors that significantly reduce motivation and, as a result, negatively impact writing performance.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Writing in EFL*

Writing is one of the most cognitively demanding skills in both first and foreign language contexts. It requires mastery of linguistic accuracy, coherence, organization, and the ability to convey ideas effectively. At the university level, especially among English department students, writing becomes even more formal and structured, demanding higher proficiency and critical thinking. (Yenti & Susanti, 2025) emphasized that academic writing is not only technical but also affected by internal motivation and confidence, which are often lacking in EFL students due to insufficient practice and apprehension. This aligns with (Pratiwi, 2024), who found that writing anxiety and lack of experience significantly influence EFL students' writing performance, suggesting that addressing the foundational writing skills is as crucial as addressing affective barriers like anxiety.

To support writing development, recent studies have explored the role of feedback and technological tools. Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE), such as Grammarly, has gained attention for its potential in reducing surface-level errors and enhancing writing fluency. (Li et al., 2023a) noted

that AWE is especially useful in the revision stage, helping students detect grammar and clarity issues while promoting autonomy and reflective thinking. However, they caution against relying solely on AWE, as it often overlooks higher-order writing aspects such as argumentation and content structure.

Furthermore, combining AWE with peer feedback—called the Integrated Feedback Model (IFM)—has shown promising results in enhancing both writing performance and student engagement.

This combination helps balance immediate, surface-level corrections with deeper feedback on writing logic and organization. According to (Li et al., 2023a), peer discussions foster critical analysis, perspective-taking, and negotiation of meaning, which are essential in developing students' writing maturity. Students reported that receiving comments from peers helped clarify AWE feedback, encouraged self-revision, and promoted confidence.

Studies published in Elsevier journals have also confirmed that writing proficiency in EFL settings is a multidimensional construct shaped by instructional design, feedback quality, and emotional factors. For example, Xu & Gibbons (2025) found that students with stronger self-regulation and exposure to feedback-rich environments developed better writing habits and confidence. Similarly, Guo et al. (2025) argue that writing instruction must integrate both linguistic and affective components to support students holistically. These insights reinforce the need to not only understand the causes of writing anxiety but also strengthen writing skills through strategic pedagogy and feedback practices using both human and AI-based support tools.

### *Anxiety in Writing*

Anxiety is a typical emotion that people experience in life when things get tough, and it can happen to pupils in a classroom. (Sabti et al., 2024) anxiety is an unavoidable emotion that influences students during their learning process. However, the majority of students may experience stress or discouragement as a result of the difficulties they must overcome when writing. They will eventually become so anxious that they will stop attempting to write altogether. High anxiety levels can therefore hinder a student's ability to learn a language.

This is corroborated by (Li et al., 2023b) assertion that numerous studies in the field of teaching English writing have demonstrated that writing anxiety is a significant element that influences students' perceptions of the quality of their writing.

Foreign language anxiety is linked to three types of anxiety that emerge in both pedagogical and social evaluation contexts: communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Communication anxiety refers to a lack of confidence or nervousness when initiating conversations

with others. Students often feel shy and anxious when they have to engage in real-life communication, even though they may already have a good understanding of the concepts or ideas they want to express. Those who frequently experience anxiety tend to face more difficulties in communicating fluently in a foreign language, as they feel that their speaking efforts are being watched or judged. This is why communication anxiety plays a significant role in disrupting the process of learning a second or foreign language—students are more likely to feel stressed when expressing their thoughts in a language that is not their mother tongue.

## METHOD

This study employed a Qualitative research study which focused on the writing anxiety of students. This study described and provided detailed interview analysis data collection. Qualitative study employed a qualitative approach, suitable for in-depth examination on a small sample or a single case. Given the research goal of exploring anxiety experienced by college students in the Academic Writing class session, this methodology was deemed fitting. The study focused on a limited number of participants, especially 8 students from the English Department at University Muhammadiyah Prof. DR. HAMKA, who had completed Academic Writing courses, allowing for a detailed exploration of their experiences and challenges in the class. The students were selected based on their sufficient experience and adaptation to the language, enabling them to articulate their anxiety about Academic Writing. To gather the data, the study utilized a closed-ended question, specifically by the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), which helped identify the types of writing anxiety experienced by the students. The Interview questions were designed to obtain relevant information aligned with the research objectives.

The study utilized a semi-structured interview guide consisting of questions exploring internal factors (e.g., "Does lack of experience make you feel challenged in the writing process?"), external factors (e.g., "Does feedback from lecturers affect your writing anxiety?"), and mental health impacts (e.g., "Does writing anxiety affect your self-esteem?") to gather in-depth insights into students' experiences with writing anxiety.

## FINDINGS

The findings of this research indicate that both internal and external factors contribute significantly to writing anxiety among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. One prominent internal factor is the lack of experience in academic writing. Many students, particularly those in the early semesters of their studies, acknowledged limited exposure to writing tasks such as essays, papers, or research articles. This limited practice often resulted in uncertainty and hesitation when completing academic writing assignments, contributing to a sense of inexperience and inadequacy. Another internal factor that emerged is the low level of confidence in writing abilities. Several students expressed a lack of self-assurance, especially when confronted with the possibility of making errors in grammar, vocabulary, or sentence structure. These linguistic challenges not only hindered their ability to express ideas clearly but also reinforced a cycle of doubt and reluctance. In addition to language difficulties, students often experienced anxiety and internal pressure rooted in fear of failure, self-doubt, and difficulties in organizing or articulating thoughts. The writing process was frequently viewed as complex and intimidating, particularly due to unfamiliarity with academic structures and the perceived need for advanced vocabulary. This perception was amplified by students' struggles in the early stages of writing, such as identifying main ideas, constructing coherent outlines, and developing logical flow in their arguments.

Themes	Sub-Themes	Respondent
Internal Factors	Lack of Experience	Most participants admitted to limited experience, especially in early semester (Au, Am, Ji, K)
	Low Confidence	Several student felt insecure due to grammar/vocab issues and fear of errors (Au, D and K)
	Language Challenges	Vocabulary and sentence structure were common struggles (Au and D)
	Anxiety and Pressure	Anxiety arises from self doubt, fear of mistakes, or inability to express idea (J and K)
	Perceptions of Writing	Seen as difficult due to unfamiliarity with structure or limited vocabulary
	Lecture Feedback	Mixed reactions; positive feedback boosts confidence, but inconsistent feedback create stress

External Factors	Time Constraint	Deadline trigger anxiety in some but help other stay disciplined (J, K and K)
	Topic& Task Clarity	Difficult or uninteresting topic contribute to pressure (K and D)
	Guidance & Practice Opportunities	Student request more practical support, clear structure and more writing focused courses (D)

External factors also played a substantial role in shaping students' experiences with academic writing. Feedback from lecturers was seen as both beneficial and challenging. While constructive comments and encouragement helped some students gain clarity and motivation, inconsistent or overly critical feedback often led to stress, confusion, and a feeling of inadequacy. Furthermore, time constraints emerged as a source of writing anxiety. Although some students appreciated deadlines as a motivating tool to stay disciplined, others reported that tight deadlines triggered stress and reduced their ability to produce quality work, particularly when experiencing writer's block or uncertainty in their writing direction. The nature of the assigned topic also influenced students' engagement. When topics were unclear, unappealing, or lacked personal relevance, students found it more difficult to write, leading to increased pressure and decreased interest. Finally, the study revealed a widespread need for more structured support and frequent practice opportunities in academic writing. Students voiced a desire for writing-focused courses and more direct guidance from instructors, emphasizing the importance of practical application over theoretical instruction. The combination of these internal and external factors highlights the multifaceted nature of writing anxiety and suggests the need for comprehensive pedagogical approaches that foster skill development, confidence, and emotional resilience in EFL academic writing contexts.

One of the most prominent themes was a lack of experience in academic writing. Many students admitted to having minimal exposure to structured writing tasks such as essays, reports, or articles during the early semesters of their studies. The limited frequency of writing assignments left them feeling unprepared to meet academic expectations. This lack of consistent engagement contributed to hesitation and a general sense of uncertainty when approaching writing tasks.

Another major theme that emerged was low self-confidence due to linguistic limitations. Students reported that grammatical inaccuracies, limited vocabulary, and difficulties with sentence construction often caused them to doubt their writing abilities. These linguistic challenges not only hindered their ability to express ideas clearly but also reinforced their fear of making mistakes,

contributing to insecurity and reluctance during the writing process. These issues were closely related to challenges in language use, particularly in selecting the appropriate academic vocabulary, verb tense, or syntactic structure. The cognitive load required to manage these aspects often distracted students from focusing on higher-order writing concerns such as idea development and organization.

In addition to technical challenges, students also described writing-related anxiety and internal pressure. This anxiety was fueled by a fear of failure, uncertainty in how to begin or structure their writing, and stress about meeting academic standards. Some students experienced writer's block, especially when under time constraints, which further intensified their stress and diminished productivity. These emotional responses were compounded by negative perceptions toward academic writing, where students viewed writing as inherently difficult and overwhelming due to unfamiliarity with academic formats and lack of clear guidance.

The role of lecturer feedback also featured strongly in student narratives. While constructive and encouraging feedback helped boost motivation, some students felt disheartened by unclear, inconsistent, or overly critical evaluations. Such feedback left them confused about how to improve and uncertain about their actual writing abilities. Similarly, time constraints were identified as a recurring source of stress. While some students recognized deadlines as helpful for maintaining focus, others reported feeling anxious when rushed, particularly when assignments required deeper thinking and multiple revisions. Many expressed a preference for more flexible timelines to accommodate the complexity of academic writing tasks.

Two additional factors also shaped students' writing engagement: topic relevance and clarity, and the need for practical guidance and support. When topics were perceived as too broad, unclear, or disconnected from students' interests, their motivation and engagement diminished. On the other hand, being allowed to choose topics or write about something meaningful improved creativity and enthusiasm. Lastly, students voiced a strong desire for more practical instruction in academic writing. They indicated that theoretical knowledge alone was insufficient and advocated for scaffolded writing courses that include regular practice, direct mentoring, and timely feedback to gradually build competence and confidence.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has revealed that writing anxiety among English education students at UHAMKA is significantly shaped by both internal and external factors. Internally, students struggle with limited experience in academic writing, low confidence due to linguistic limitations, and difficulty in using appropriate vocabulary and grammar. These challenges contribute to a persistent sense of inadequacy

and psychological pressure, leading many students to view writing as a difficult and intimidating task. Additionally, anxiety, fear of failure, and writer's block—especially under time constraints—intensify the emotional burden that students face when engaging in academic writing.

Externally, students' experiences are further influenced by the nature of lecturer feedback, the pressure of tight deadlines, and the clarity or appeal of assigned topics. While supportive feedback can motivate students, unclear or overly critical comments often have the opposite effect, increasing anxiety and uncertainty. Moreover, when students are given writing topics that are vague or uninteresting, their engagement and creativity tend to decrease. A consistent theme across participant responses is the desire for more structured, practical support from instructors, such as writing-focused courses, hands-on guidance, and scaffolded exercises. These findings suggest the need for a comprehensive pedagogical approach that not only develops students' writing skills but also supports their emotional well-being and self-confidence throughout the academic writing process.

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