

STUDENT'S STRATEGIES IN COPING WITH ENGLISH WRITING ANXIETY

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A B S T R A C T

Investigating the causal factors, effects, and strategies to overcome writing anxiety is the aim of this research. A fifth semester student of English Education Study Program, Teacher Training and Education Faculty of Universitas Tanjungpura with high learning motivation was chosen as the participant of this research. A case study design was employed in this research by using semi-structured interview and document analysis as the method of data collection. The result of the data analysis indicated that the student experienced cognitive writing anxiety where she felt difficult in deciding a writing topic, choosing relevant vocabulary, and using appropriate grammar. Writing anxiety was caused by a high frequency of assignment, feeling lack of linguistics skill and vocabulary, and fear of being criticized by others. Based on the findings, it was revealed that the writing anxiety experienced by the participant brought a facilitative effect toward her writing performance which led her to take some efforts by managing several strategies to overcome the writing anxiety. It was reported that vocabulary checking, creating constructive surroundings to have writing practice, diary writing, and doing writing challenge were strategies she had used to overcome her writing anxiety.

Introduction

Sufficient writing skill plays an important role in learning English as a foreign language to support other language skills; listening, speaking, and reading. Haider and Hyland as cited in Fareed, Ashraf, and Bilal (2016) state that improvement in writing skills measures ones' development of language performance. It reflects the successfulness of the learning process of an English language learner that indicates the language proficiency the one has gained is sufficient. Writing as a productive skill has been considered as a demanding skill for English language learners required in university. Especially in academic writing, pouring ideas into papers not only involves ideas, but also the capability of generating the ideas together with appropriate structure and the accuracy of grammar and other language features of English. Since academic writing demands a higher level of competence compared to casual writing, this made it an obstacle for foreign language learners in the process of language learning in writing. They frequently complain about a lack of writing skills. The students who do not believe in their own capacities of writing cause them to procrastinate or having writer's block (Aunurrahman, 2019). As a result, poor writing performance becomes a source of self-doubt. Similarly, writing, particularly in academic form, has proven to be a difficult undertaking for students learning English as a second language (EFL). Several elements such as vocabulary and citation (in research proposal writing) were ignored by students. Some EFL students, according to Rezeki (2018), still struggle with citation writing. This takes the shape of grammatical mistakes and the context of a citation used as a source while writing an idea. This inaccurate citation writing then led to plagiarism accusations. As a

result, this must be taken into account because citation writing is an important aspect of academic writing. It's crucial to raise students' awareness of citation writing and other aspects of academic writing.

Students learning English as a foreign language frequently experience writing anxiety. It is still considered as a significant problem in the process of teaching and learning (Wahyuni, Oktavia, and Marlina, 2019). Several general factors might be the reasons that make them feel anxious about learning a new language. A study conducted by Kusumaningputri, Ningsih, and Wisasongko (2018) showed that insufficient writing practice, language difficulties, and insufficient writing technique become the causal factors of the anxiety perceived by foreign language learners, particularly the first-year students. Loppies (2020) identifies linguistic problems, time pressure, lacking of experience of writing practice, teachers' negative evaluation, and pressure for work as the major causes of students' writing anxiety. Consequently, those factors influence their motivation and self-confidence in learning the target language in advance. Students' academic writing performance has been shown to be affected by writing anxiety.

Researchers in the field of education have paid close attention to the problem of writing anxiety. It has been seen as a challenge not only for high school learners but also college learners of foreign languages. However, Jawas (2019) points out that if the possible factors of writing anxiety are realized and managed well, It is possible to develop writing skills and hence influence learners' writing performance. As a result, university-level foreign language students are the focus of this problem. A student studying in the third year in the English department of teachers training and education faculty was chosen as the participant of this study. The student said that she had struggled with writing anxiety. Since the English department is a preparatory stage for the students in preparing themselves to be an English teacher in the future, there is a demand of having sufficient English skills. Particularly, writing as one of the productive skills makes her experience a considerable amount of anxiety.

Anxiety has been a barrier to EFL students learning English. It primarily affects productive skills like speaking and writing. Pratama, Ikhsanudin, and Salam (2018) found that public speaking can be one of the most difficult aspects of learning English, especially in terms of speaking, in a study of a third-semester student. However, it has been discovered that anxiety can be addressed utilizing a variety of strategies including rehearsal, relaxation, visualization, gestures, and the use of a note card. Several causes can contribute to speaking anxiety. In a study of an eighth-grade Junior High School student, Riftriani, Ikhsanudin, and Rezeki (2019), the participant tended to remain silent and use mother language during an English-speaking exercise in the classroom. Internal and environmental factors contributed to the anxiety in speaking English. They are insecurity, fear of making mistakes, shyness, and the surrounding environment. Speaking fear has been mentioned as one of the barriers to mastering English on numerous occasions. However, as one of the difficulties in learning English, little is known about writing anxiety. In fact, English writing can generate anxiety, which can be as difficult as speaking for English learners. The previous research conducted by Fitrinada, Loeneto, and Fiftinova (2018) has investigated the correlation between students' writing anxiety and their writing performance. The focus of this study was mostly about the description of several types of writing anxiety certain students in Sriwijaya University faced and the influence of those writing anxiety toward their writing performance. The result proved that writing anxiety gave significant effects on their writing performance. Another research conducted by Miri and Joia (2018) toward Afghan students' focused on the

challenges faced by the students in facing writing anxiety and their coping strategies. The findings showed that the major cause of writing anxiety was the little exposure to writing activities and to cope with that they implement several strategies like receiving feedback from teachers, doing extensive reading, developing vocabulary knowledge, and practicing writing. Loppies (2020) also investigated English writing anxiety; causes and coping strategies. The study revealed that the type of writing anxiety experienced mostly by students is somatic anxiety. It is confirmed in the study that the majority of the students felt panicked (which was one of the emotional factors) when assigned to write under time constraint. It is also discovered that several strategies were applied by the students in coping with the writing anxiety; outlining, paraphrasing, taking notes, summarizing, and peer discussion.

From the explanation above, the issues to be discussed in this research were: 1) participant's writing anxiety, 2) types of writing anxiety, 3) factors causing writing anxiety, 4) strategies in coping with writing anxiety.

Research Method

A case study was chosen as the design of the research in gaining deep information about a particular phenomenon which is defined as “a method involving systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or function” (Berg & Lune, 2017, p.170). The subject refers to the writing anxiety experienced by the participant. Case study design provides specific explanations about research subjects. Hence, to help in answering research questions, there seems to be a necessity to hold an in-depth study using case study.

The participant involved in this research is a fifth-semester student of the English Education study program at Tanjungpura University Pontianak. As she is studying in the English Education study program, which is an institution to prepare the students to be future English teachers, there is a demand to have adequate English skills, especially in writing. In view of academic writing, she experienced feelings of unease and unconfident in the first year of study. She felt that the demands in writing skills are different from the skills required in high school.

Specifically, Ms. D met these criteria of being this research participant:

1. She had taken all writing subjects (Writing Skills Development, Paragraph Writing, Essay Writing, and Writing Research Proposal) in her third year of study
2. She has obtained minimum B scores, which were categorized as good work, on all the writing courses that she had taken in her fifth semesters of her study (shown by transcript)
3. She practiced regularly outside the classroom (has high motivation in English writing)
4. She had experienced anxiety in English writing

An interview was conducted to support the research by offering explanations for major events as well as insights representing the views of participants (Yin, 2018). The interview was semi-structured. The purpose of this interview is to learn more about how the participant dealt with writing anxiety, as well as the circumstances that contributed to her anxiety, the repercussions of her anxiety, and her coping strategies. The interview took about 53 minutes.

The following information were included in the predetermined interview questions.

1. The participant's experience in the beginning of her study in the English Education study program.
2. How writing subject were managed in her classroom (writing classes)

3. The activities conducted in the writing classes
4. The problems she faced in taking writing classes
5. How writing anxiety affected her writing performance
6. The writing activities and how they were practiced by the participant outside of the classroom
7. The strategies she used in coping with the writing anxiety

Observation on related documents and artifacts was the second data collection method used in this research. The documents were utilized in addition to the interview to obtain supporting and factual information for the interview results. In this study, the documents included the participant's notes, diary writing, and her writing challenge text were used to back up the facts from the interview.

The data analysis strategy that was employed in this research followed the data analysis model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) which consisted of three stages. Data reduction is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, looking at the themes and patterns, and discarding unnecessary (Miles et al., 2014). Results from the documents and interview transcription from the interview section were collected and analyzed after the information were organized. The information that is not related to the research questions was reduced in this section.

The data that were saved to be analyzed were those that were determined to be relevant to the study's objectives to answer research questions: causes of writing anxiety, how anxiety affected the participant's writing performance, and the strategies utilized by the participant to overcome writing anxiety. The data obtained were synthesized with ideas linked to writing anxiety, including the writing anxiety, causal factors, effects, and the participant's strategies for overcoming writing anxiety, in the phase of drawing conclusions. The research method contains the type of research, time and place of study, targets/targets, research subjects, procedures, instruments, data analysis techniques, and other matters related to the way of research.

Result and Discussion

Answering first research purpose: finding out whether the participant experienced writing anxiety, this research found out that the participant had experienced writing anxiety, that is cognitive writing anxiety. She remarked that writing a composition, especially in the form of academic writing was challenging for her. She became overly concerned with her writing such as grammar and vocabulary, which led in procrastination. From the interview, it can be inferred that the participant experienced cognitive anxiety. It is indicated by type of anxiety the participant had that is the feelings of worry of evaluation. In addition, the information about the second research purpose was obtained. The result showed that there are several aspects from writing that the participant felt anxious about. Deciding on a writing topic was one of the aspects. The lecturer tends to let the students choose their own topic. Ms. D found it difficult to begin her writing because she had no notion what to write in order to complete the task. In starting to write a text with a free-to-choose topic, it is hard for her to decide a theme. The next aspect is choosing relevant vocabulary. Having enough vocabulary is also not enough in composing academic writing. Some words might have similar meanings but those also have different meanings in different contexts. This difficulty obstructed her in composing a written text. Several times, she found out that she did not use the appropriate vocabulary in certain contexts. The last aspect that made the participant felt anxious is using appropriate grammar. Feeling afraid of using inappropriate grammar is the next factor

that caused Ms. D's writing anxiety. She did not feel confident in writing since she was not sure about the appropriate grammar that is used in certain types of writing.

The results of the research indicated that there are three causal factors of writing anxiety. The first factor is the high frequency of assignment from various subjects she had taken. She had to finish her writing assignment with time constraint. She only had limited amount of time to complete the assignment of the subject which means that she had a pressure to finish it in short length of time. The next factor is feeling lack of linguistics skills and vocabulary. Since the writing subjects required the students to write in English, there is an obstacle in terms of grammar and vocabulary. When she was about to write, it was a burden for her to pour her ideas into the paper because of the limited vocabulary she had. This finally caused her to gain low self-confidence in writing. The last factor of writing anxiety is fear of being criticized by others. The feelings of fear in making mistakes in writing then lead Ms. D to be afraid to be judged by others. She did not feel confident about her writing when she looked at her friends' writing composition. Among the external factors that influence the participant in having writing anxiety was the judgment from her classmates. When it comes to the activity of writing in the classroom, her friends started to criticize her writing.

As the effort in coping with writing anxiety Ms. D tried several strategies to improve her writing skills. The information about the strategies she used in coping with the writing anxiety was obtained from the interview and supported with data from documents analysis. Further, she made some strategies as follows. As one of the efforts in reducing her writing anxiety, Ms. D tried to improve her writing skills. To achieve it, she started by trying to accept some inputs by doing peer correction for her writing composition with her friends.

"I showed my writing to my friends so like we have peer correction. It is to check is this correct or not or is there any mistakes or something that I need to revise or something"

By doing this, she expected that she could find some mistakes that she had to revise. By asking her friend she will realize whether there are some aspects of writing that she had to learn more. In the same way, she also learned to spot some writing mistakes by doing peer correction with her friends. One of the difficulties that Ms. D experienced is the skill of vocabulary. Therefore, by overcoming the difficulty, she tried to use a source to help her check whether her writing is already good or not. By using Google Translate, it helped her in terms of deciding the vocabulary.

"I want to check my writing whether it's right or not so usually I used google translate so first I write my own. After that I have a look on google translate so whether it's right or not it is because I don't feel confident in my writing so I checked it on google translate"

In the process of writing she started by writing her composition in Indonesian. After the Indonesian writing composition was finished, she continued to use Google Translate to convert her writing into English. To maintain her motivation in improving her writing skill, Ms. D and her friends created a study group to practice English together. Based on the interview with Ms. D, she had two groups that had activities to increase their writing skills. The first group consisted of Ms. Dwi and most of her classmates. This group was

named ESC Path Finders. In the study club, there are several activities that they do to improve their English. One of the activities related to writing skills is diary writing. In this activity, they were required to write a diary every day.

“...we wrote like diary and something like that...so we are asked to write everyday even little and short one it's okay as long as we practice everyday...”

The second group was made by Ms. D and her classmates with smaller numbers of people. It consisted of six people. That group was particularly created for a writing challenge activity where they challenged themselves to write down some daily journals with different topics on each day and they had to do this for a whole month. Diary writing was done by Ms. D with her study club named ESC Path Finders. In this group, they had to write down a diary each day. It does not have to be a long written text as long as they made it each day. Each person in that group had to write a diary and in the next meeting they would have to share it by reading it in front of their friends in that group. After that, other friends would give some comments toward the diary in terms of the context and also the writing. This activity was aimed to build their writing habit so they would get used to English writing. In the group of six people, Ms. D and her classmates created a writing challenge called the thirty-days writing challenge. In this activity, they had to write down a text with a certain topic each day for a month.

“we made another group which just consist of six of us so that group was particularly made for challenge so everyday we write on different topics and we will send it to the group (whatsapp group) and then the other friends will correct the writing “

After they wrote down the text, each of them had to share it to their WhatsApp group to have their work checked by the other friends. So the other friends would give some suggestions about the writing they sent.

The findings of this study suggested that writing anxiety had a positive effect on a learner who experienced it. Although it is well-understood that writing anxiety can have both positive and negative effects, the findings of this research was contradicted with the majority of the previous research which claimed that anxiety is something that stands against the improvement of language skills, especially writing (Rezaei & Jafari, 2014). However, by the data shown from interview, the research participant seemed to have a constructive effect toward writing anxiety which made her feel motivated in improving her writing skills so that she can overcome her writing anxiety and relieved from the negative feelings. Even though she stated that the anxiety made her took a lot of time to write, she eventually ended up by doing several strategies as the effort to improve her writing capability. This is what is called the facilitative effects of writing anxiety which the effects resulting from feelings of anxiety can be managed well and produce a series of strategies to overcome it. Language anxiety was categorized as one of affective aspects in language learning. Brown (2006) stated that affective aspects consisted of apparent self-esteem, extroversion, anxiety, motivation, etc. In other words, this supported the idea that anxiety was also a part of the language learning process.

The findings showed that the strategies used by the research participant were cognitive and socio-affective strategies. It is supported by Loppies (2020) who found that there were three strategies used to overcome writing anxiety namely rhetorical strategies, cognitive strategies, and socio-affective strategies. Rhetorical strategies refer to the way the students arrange topic sentence and supporting sentences. Instead of using rhetorical strategies, the findings in this research suggested that research participant used cognitive

strategies and socio-affective strategies. Cognitive strategies are associated with relevant information or material to support their writing which is used by those who feel anxious about the use of vocabulary, diction, or logical sentences. In this study, the research participant used peer correction and vocabulary checking. Peer correction is believed to be the effort for the participant to get information about grammar, vocabulary, and technical terms of her writing. She would get inputs in the form of suggestions from her peers. Vocabulary checking was also categorized as cognitive strategies where the research participant received new vocabulary from the source that is Google Translate. It helped her in writing as the reference for pouring her ideas. From the findings of this research, it is discovered that the socio-affective strategies used by the research participant in reducing writing anxiety were creating constructive surroundings, writing diary, and doing writing challenge. Socio-affective strategies were related to the interaction with others and efforts to improve emotions, attitude, and motivation in writing. It is believed that by creating constructive surroundings was an effective way to enhance self-motivation toward writing. This finding is in line with a statement by Mu (2005) that socio-affective strategies, the interaction with others and useful actions to set good emotions, attitude and motivation in writing is highly recommended. It is believed that in the activity of writing diary, research participant was constructively motivated to make good writing. This does not only involve an individual, but also interaction between the group members. Thus, the activity of writing challenge is believed to be interesting and triggering writing activity since there were a lot of topics each day which were not really difficult to write on. The topics were related to daily life so it seemed not burdening the research participant.

Conclusion

It is inevitable that in learning English, a learner might experience writing anxiety because it is part of her learning process. The causes of the anxiety itself can be varied from one learner to another. The causes of writing anxiety in this research were categorized as cognitive because they refer to the problems in terms of the technicality of writing. The causes were a lack of vocabulary, difficulty in using appropriate grammar, difficulty in using the relevant word choice, difficulty in choosing the topic, and the feelings of being afraid to be evaluated. Writing anxiety does not always end up with a negative effect on the English learner, but it can also boost the motivation of the learner and positively affect (facilitating effect) the learning performance of the learner. As a result, by having a facilitative effect of writing anxiety, the participant of this research is doing several strategies so that she would be able to cope with the writing anxiety. Those strategies are doing peer correction, doing vocabulary checking, creating constructive surroundings, writing diary, and doing writing challenge. However, the research participant did not only ignore the feelings of anxiety, but she made several efforts by doing strategies in order to improve her writing skills and gradually reduce her writing anxiety.

This research was conducted to find out the causes and effects of having writing anxiety for English learners. Several strategies in coping with writing anxiety were also discovered by the findings of this research. Language instructors can direct the learners to create group discussions as one of the platforms that motivate the learners to improve their writing skills, to increase their motivation and build a community that is supportive for each other. Reflecting on the findings of this study, it is recommended for future researchers to conduct a study involving more than one student in order to obtain a

broader viewpoint and information on writing anxiety. Highlighting the external factor of writing anxiety experienced by the participant, it is also important for English learners to take others' critics on writing whether it is from peers or lecturer as a reflection to improve awareness in writing. Finally, the current study has discovered the occurrence of writing anxiety in academic writing. It is recommended for the future researchers to investigate writing anxiety on a particular type of academic writing so that it can provide detailed and in-depth information about the specific type of academic writing.

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