

## **ANXIETY IN WRITING SKILLS: THE VOICES OF EFL UNIVERSITY LEARNERS**

**Dr. Hayat Rasheed Alamri**

Taibah University, College of Education, Curricula & Teaching Methods Dept., Saudi Arabia

**Ashwag Rakad Alanazi**

Taibah University, College of Education, Curricula & Teaching Methods Dept., Saudi Arabia

**Sarah Marzoug Alrashedi**

Ministry of Education, Marash School, Hail City, Saudi Arabia

---

**ABSTRACT:** *This descriptive study explores writing anxiety attributed to the following factors: structuring paragraphs, sentence accuracy, feedback, corrections, grading, and classroom learning environment. The research sample was 327 Saudi female EFL university learners in Madinah, Saudi Arabia, who responded to a 28-closed item questionnaire. The results revealed that the participants were usually anxious about paragraph structuring but sometimes experienced anxiety about constructing proper sentences with correct grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. An unexpected finding was that Saudi female EFL university learners were sometimes anxious about receiving feedback, corrections, and grading in writing tasks. The results also indicate that the classroom learning environment was sometimes a source of anxiety.*

**KEYWORDS:** writing anxiety, structuring paragraphs, sentence accuracy, feedback, classroom environment

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

Writing is considered a productive skill in English as a foreign language (EFL) as it involves producing language instead of receiving it (Sulistyo et al., 2019). Flynn and Stainthorp (2006) defined writing as "an example of human information processing in action. It is a highly complex task that requires the orchestration of some different activities simultaneously and thereby places great demands on the cognitive system" (p.54). Thus, writing is regarded as a physical and mental activity to express thoughts, ideas, and feelings during the process. It is dependent on many language factors, including vocabulary, structure, spelling, punctuation, and the learner's ability to organize their ideas (Dhanya & Alamelu, 2019). Writing also involves cognitive activities such as interpretation, reflection, and text production (Maolida & Mustika, 2018). Additionally, writing requires thinking, drafting, revising, and organizing ideas coherently (Pariyanto & Pradipta, 2019). Briesmaster and Etchegaray (2017) summarized the writing sub-skills and mechanical components as spelling, punctuation correction, selecting the proper vocabulary, correct structure, paragraphs and texts, and handwriting. Cohesion may arguably be added to this list, as it is necessary to make writing more accessible to the reader.

*Factors affect writing proficiency in EFL university classrooms*

Many studies have explored the factors influencing students' EFL writing skills. Herdi (2015)

---

identified several student-centred factors thought to influence writing proficiency, including motivation, self-esteem, anxiety, risk-taking, and inhibition. Anderman and Sinatra (2012) argue that students struggle with writing skills due to insufficient reading and a lack of motivation and practice. While transforming their ideas into writing in the target language, students can face psychological, cognitive, social, and linguistic difficulties. Fareed et al. (2016) explain that EFL students often encounter difficulties in writing skills. Insufficient language skills in grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, writing anxiety, a lack of ideas, their L1, and poor sentence structure were all found to be contributory causes. Their findings also revealed that ineffective teaching methods, untrained teachers, lack of motivation, large classes, and a lack of writing activities could cause a deficiency in writing skills.

Similarly, Dhanya and Alamelu (2019) identified the factors that affect writing proficiency inside the classroom, including motivation, digital technologies, positive environment, assessment techniques, types of provided feedback, and the teacher-student relationship. Jalaluddin (2019) argues that poor writing skills originate from teachers' failure to use adequate pedagogic approaches to writing and provide students with constructive feedback.

Previous studies have attempted to categorize these factors into teacher and learner-related components. Ineffective teaching strategies, lack of supportive activities, improper assessment techniques, and lack of feedback and correction may be teacher-related factors. Whereas low motivation, lack of self-esteem, a high level of anxiety, insufficient reading and practice, L1 interference, and insufficient linguistic proficiency in grammar, syntax, and vocabulary may be regarded as student-related factors that can impact EFL learners' writing proficiency.

#### *Anxiety as a factor affects writing proficiency in EFL classrooms*

According to Matsumoto (2009), anxiety refers to a "fearful mood that has a vague or no specific focus and is accompanied by bodily arousal" (p.46). Karakaya and Ülper (2011) define language anxiety as "the feeling of worry that prevents a learner to succeed" (p.703). Hashemi (2011) argues that language learners often experience anxiety when learning a new language because they are confronted with language learning challenges, individual differences, and the fear of being assessed and losing marks. According to Senko (2016), writing anxiety is an important issue that can impede writing skills and lead to low achievement. Writing anxiety, he added, is linked to other aspects such as students' attitudes toward writing skills and, ultimately, their motivation to write.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on language anxiety. Anxiety has been linked to language learning success, with the fear of being judged having been found to be a significant factor influencing EFL writing (Cheng et al., 1999). Negari and Rezaabadi (2012) examined the relationship between student anxiety and essay writing and identified a positive correlation. Interestingly, students' writing grades were higher in the final writing test when they had more significant anxiety, and when students were more anxious during their final exam, their grades improved in all areas of their writing. However, the study discovered grading

to be a contributory factor, as when the participants were informed that their work would not be graded, they became less apprehensive and performed better.

Liu and Ni (2015) investigated the overall pattern, effect, and causes of writing anxiety among 1174 first-year Chinese EFL university students. The data were gathered via a 26-item Foreign Language Writing Anxiety Scale (FLWAS), using semi-structured interviews, a background questionnaire, and an argumentative essay of 250-300 words English writing test. The findings revealed more than half of male and female students were confident in (FLWAS) and were neither fearful nor apprehensive about having their English writing graded. However, male students were substantially more anxious and less confident in writing in English. Additionally, English writing anxiety and low confidence were found to be significant negative predictors of students' English writing skills.

Olanezhad (2015) investigated EFL students' L2 writing anxiety levels and sources with one hundred and fifty Iranian EFL university students majoring in Translation, Teaching, and Literature divided into three groups completed the English Writing Apprehension/Attitude Test (EWAT) questionnaire. They found that comments about evaluation and confidence in writing caused the most anxiety among participants. Moreover, that the participants in each group had varying levels of writing anxiety, stemming from one or more sources: primarily, previous educational shortcomings and then lack of confidence and concern about their teacher's evaluation.

Yetis (2017) investigated the causes of writing anxiety in 33 Turkish students studying French as a second language, using a writing anxiety assessment, a language competency exam, a retrospective composing-process questionnaire, a writing attitude scale, and semi-structured interviews. The results revealed that the course, competency levels, attitudes about writing, and composition were all potential sources of writing anxiety. The results confirmed the prior findings and suggested that other causes of writing anxiety included classmates, time pressures on writing activities, and teacher's attitudes toward students.

Jawas (2019) identified the factors that contribute to EFL students' writing anxiety and their strategies to overcome them. Using open and closed-ended questionnaire questions organizing thoughts, settling on a thesis statement, and creating the essay content emerged as the aspects causing the most anxiety during the writing process. The results revealed that the essay assignments that must be completed in class, and the limited time available are the most prominent factors causing writing anxiety. Furthermore, teacher and peer competition produce anxiety in the classroom, thereby contributing to writing anxiety. Furthermore, developing essay outlines, improving background knowledge pertaining to the essay topic, finding supporting references, pausing and breaks during the writing process, having peer or lecturer discussions, and remaining focused and calm were all strategies adopted to reduce writing anxiety.

Individual differences in 100 Iraqi university EFL learners' writing anxiety, writing self-efficacy, and writing achievement motivation in the Iraqi EFL environment were investigated by Sabti et al. (2019). Three questionnaires, the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), Writer Self-Perception Scale (WSPS), and Achievement Goal Questionnaire (AGQ), and one descriptive writing task were employed, revealing that the higher the level of writing anxiety, the poorer the writing performance, but the higher the level of writing self-efficacy and motivation, the better the performance.

Arindra and Ardi (2020) evaluated the levels of L2 writing anxiety and the use of writing assessment rubrics among seventy-three Indonesian students, examining the relationship between the two variables. The researchers used the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) and evaluated students' responses to a writing assessment rubric questionnaire to collect data. Students' L2 language writing anxiety and use of writing assessment rubrics were apparently at a moderate level. The correlation between the two variables was strong and negative, indicating that prior knowledge of writing rubrics reduced writing anxiety.

Anxiety affects language learning as indicated by Abdala and Elnadeef (2019), who found EFL Saudi university students feel anxious about making mistakes in English class and fear their colleagues' scorn.

There have been numerous studies investigating writing anxiety in the Saudi context. Alrabai (2014) conducted a three-year survey of 1389 Saudi EFL students to examine foreign language anxiety (FLA) levels and sources. Learners described the anxiety they frequently experience in English language classes and identified possible causes. The study employed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), comprising 33 items. Learners in the first and second experiments had relatively high anxiety levels, but those in the third study had moderate anxiety levels. However, the students in all three experiments were moderately highly anxious. The factor analysis conducted regarding the FLA data indexed the sources of anxiety mentioned by the participants. The first FLCAS component, "communication anxiety", referred to students' anxieties about being negatively assessed by their teacher and peers, as well as negative comparisons they make between themselves and other EFL students. The second component of the FLCAS is known as "comprehension apprehension", which refers to students' anxiety of not understanding and following the teacher. The third FLCAS component, referred to as "negative attitudes about English class", was loaded with items relating to examination anxiety. 27 of the 33 questions loaded extracted components equally in all three studies, indicating the sources of anxiety indicated by participants were very comparable.

Alharbi (2019) designed a writing course based on the experiences of 74 EFL undergraduate students, aiming to study the challenges they experienced constructing a well-written paragraph in academic writing. The students' writing progress was tracked using pre-and post-tests. The results of the pre-test revealed the students were very weak in almost every aspect of writing English, with grammar the most concerning. It was also discovered that the students had

---

challenging issues in terms of the mechanics of writing. Lexical errors were the least problematic category. Nevertheless, in the post-test, significant differences were observed due to the improvement in students' writing after employing the specially designed writing course and syllabus. Only a few students made mistakes with writing mechanics: punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Moreover, the students made few errors in the grammar: sentence structure and subject-verb agreement. Similarly, they reported few lexical errors in nouns, pronouns, articles, and prepositions.

Aloairdhi (2019) investigated writing anxiety among Saudi female students enrolled in English language departments at numerous Saudi colleges. The Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) scale was used with open-ended questions to collect data from 105 randomly selected learners in a mixed-methods study. The results indicated that the participants had a moderate level of writing anxiety, principally associated with evaluation, generating ideas, grammar, time pressure, and a lack of confidence.

### **Statement of the problem**

Some EFL learners may commence university studies with minimal English language proficiency levels and language skills. Writing is considered to be one of the most critical skills for them. EFL teachers commonly agree that teaching writing from planning to final drafts is complicated. It requires learners to use writing mechanics such as spelling, grammar, capitalization, punctuation, and handwriting (Hossain, 2015). Moreover, writing skills assessment should not rely heavily on memorizing old drafts of specific compositions. On the contrary, EFL learners should be afforded multiple opportunities to produce originally written topics or focus attention on different writing aspects, such as gathering and organizing ideas, transforming ideas into written text, and reviewing and editing the first draft (Nodoushan, 2014).

Nevertheless, lack of exposure to L2, limited opportunities to practice English in the real world, and insufficient writing skills that cause challenges to EFL learners have been highlighted in previous studies (Al-Mukdad, 2019; Anh, 2019). A mixture of cognitive and social factors may affect EFL learners' writing proficiency; anxiety is considered a critical factor (Cheng, 2004). EFL university learners are sometimes frustrated and anxious in their attempts to engage in the writing process because of difficulties in demonstrating accurate, relevant, and readable content and ideas, spelling words correctly, showing consistent punctuation, and constructing grammatically correct structures. Moreover, they lack paragraph organization skills and appropriate use of transitional words and phrases (Negari & Rezaabadi, 2012). A lack of such mechanical aspects of writing skills can present severe barriers to writing proficiency.

Likewise, Saudi EFL learners demonstrate deficiency levels in writing skills. Alrabai (2014), Alharbi (2019), and Aloairdhi (2019) reported that Saudi EFL learners are unwilling to write and seem confused, anxious, and lack self-confidence during writing classes. To date, some studies have investigated writing anxiety; however, there remains a paucity of evidence detailing Saudi EFL university learners' perceptions about their anxieties with writing.

### **Purpose of the study**

The present study fills a gap in the literature by providing new insights into university learners' anxiety with writing skills, making an essential contribution to the field of L2 writing skills. It explores Saudi EFL university learners' anxiety with regard to the following factors: structuring paragraphs, sentence accuracy, feedback, corrections, grading, and classroom learning environment.

### **Research questions**

1. How often are Saudi female EFL university learners anxious about structuring paragraphs during writing tasks?
2. How often are Saudi female EFL university learners anxious about sentence accuracy during writing tasks?
3. How often are Saudi female EFL university learners anxious about feedback, corrections, and grading during writing tasks?
4. How often are Saudi female EFL university learners anxious about the classroom learning environment during writing tasks?

### **METHODOLOGY**

The data was collected using a descriptive research design. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) state that a descriptive design "summarizes the characteristics (abilities, preferences, behaviors, and so on) of individuals or groups or (sometimes) physical environments (such as schools)" (p.14). The quantitative data was gathered via a questionnaire designed to collate EFL learners' perceptions regarding writing anxiety.

#### *Participants*

This study comprises all Saudi female EFL university learners in Taibah University, Saudi Arabia, during the first and second semester of the 2020 academic year. The study sample includes 327 Saudi female EFL university learners who volunteered to participate in the study. All the participants are non-native speakers of English. The participants were instructed to rate each statement regarding their frequency of experiencing anxiety, focusing on different aspects of their writing skills. The data gathered via the demographic information section identifies the participants' characteristics, as shown in Table 1.

*Table 1. Characteristics of the research sample*

Variables		Frequencies	Percentages	Total (100%)
Age	19 - 20	291	89.0%	327 (100%)
	21 - 22	21	6.4%	
	23 - 24	9	2.8%	
	25 - 26	6	1.8%	
GPA	A	259	79.2%	327 (100%)
	B	47	14.4%	
	C	14	4.3%	
	D	7	2.1%	

As shown in Table 1, 291(89.0%) of the Saudi female EFL university learners are between 19 – 20 years old, and 259 (79.2%) have A as a grade point average (GPA).

#### *Instrumentation*

The researchers designed a closed-ended questionnaire to explore the Saudi female EFL university learners' views regarding the reviewed literature (Abdala & Elnadeef, 2019; Aloairdhi, 2019; Liu & Ni, 2015) factors that affect writing anxiety in EFL classrooms. The questionnaire comprises 25-items ranked using a five-point Likert scale (5= Always, 4= Usually, 3= Sometimes, 2= Seldom, and 1= Never). It was designed to cover four dimensions: EFL teachers' views about writing anxiety attributed to paragraph structuring; writing anxiety due to sentence accuracy; writing anxiety related to feedback, correction, and grading; and finally, writing anxiety associated with the classroom environment.

#### *Validity*

Three language teaching experts reviewed the questionnaire items and commented on their pertinence, clarity, relevance, and adequacy. They suggested some linguistic and structural modifications and added three more statements, resulting in a total of 30 items. Dimension one covered 6 items, dimension two 5 items, dimension three 11 items and dimension four 8 items.

#### *Reliability*

A pilot study was conducted with 23 Saudi EFL university students to compute the questionnaire's reliability and internal consistency to measure the extent to which the questionnaire items measure the same underlying construct. Pearson correlation was employed to describe the strength and direction of the relationship between the questionnaire items. The correlation coefficient results indicated a positive, direct, and significant relationship between the total of 5 items out of 6 of the first dimension with range values ( $r = .570-.771$ ). Item 2 showed low and non-significant results (.396). Hence, it was deleted. Likewise, the correlation coefficient results indicated a positive, direct, and significant relationship between the total of 4 items out of 5 of the second dimension with range values ( $r = .681-.769$ ). Item 5 indicated low and non-significant results (.338); therefore, it was also deleted. The third-dimension results revealed a positive, direct, and significant relationship between the total of

11 items with range values ( $r = .420-.840$ ). The fourth dimension also indicated a positive, direct, and significant relationship between the total of 8 items with range values ( $r = .533-.718$ ). Thus, the final version of the questionnaire consisted of (28) items.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was employed to measure all items' internal consistency in the questionnaire. The results indicated a high level of internal consistency and reliability between the 28 items (0.928). The first 5 items covering the first dimension showed reliability of ( $\alpha = 0.715$ ), the 4 items covering the second dimension showed a reliability of ( $\alpha = 0.757$ ), the 11 items covering the third dimension showed a reliability of ( $\alpha = 0.895$ ), while the 8 items of the fourth dimension showed a reliability of ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ). The estimated reliability of the analyzed items was above the accepted value of 0.7.

#### *Data collection*

On September 26, 2020, the questionnaire was distributed to Saudi female EFL university learners at Taibah University in Madinah, Saudi Arabia. It took approximately five weeks to receive 327 responses regarding EFL learners' voices toward writing anxiety.

#### *Data analysis*

The responses to the questionnaire were analyzed using version 25 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The quantitative data was calculated using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations). Before running any statistical tests in SPSS, negative items were reversed and recoded.

## **RESULTS**

Frequencies, percentages, means, and standards deviations were computed to answer the four research questions. The mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for each item of the questionnaire responses were used to rank the results from high to the low frequency of use.

#### *Results of writing anxiety attributed to structuring paragraphs*

The participants were asked to rate their responses to their views about anxiety attributed to structuring paragraphs on a 1–5 scale (see Table 2). The results were ranked in descending order of mean reading scores.



Table 2. EFL university learners' views of anxiety attributed to structuring paragraphs

Items	The Scale					Mean	SD	Level
	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom	Never			
1. I cannot follow the teacher's instructions in writing tasks.	148 (45.3)	78 (23.9)	43 (13.1)	23 (7.0)	35 (10.7)	3.86	1.35	Usually
2. I do not enjoy writing skills.	114 (34.9)	85 (26.0)	71 (21.7)	30 (9.2)	27 (8.3)	3.70	1.26	Usually
3. I am not able to brainstorm my ideas.	99 (30.3)	84 (25.7)	76 (23.2)	35 (10.7)	33 (10.1)	3.55	1.30	Usually
4. I cannot develop my writing skills.	102 (31.2)	80 (24.5)	69 (21.1)	39 (11.9)	37 (11.3)	3.52	1.34	Usually
5. I cannot organize my thoughts.	77 (23.5)	87 (26.6)	100 (30.6)	31 (9.5)	32 (9.8)	3.45	1.22	Usually
<b>Total</b>						3.62	1.29	Usually

According to Table 2, the results for item 1 ( $M=3.86$ ;  $SD=1.35$ ) indicate that the participants cannot "Usually" follow their teacher's instructions to structure paragraphs. Moreover, the results for item 2 ( $M=3.70$ ;  $SD=1.26$ ) show that the participants do not "Usually" enjoy writing. Likewise, it is apparent from the above data that the responses to the items 3, 4, & 5 ( $M=3.55$ ,  $SD=1.30$ ;  $M=3.52$ ,  $SD=1.34$ ;  $M=3.45$ ,  $SD=1.22$ ) indicate that the participants are "Usually" anxious about brainstorming ideas, experience difficulty in developing their writing skills, and feel anxious about organizing their thoughts while writing paragraphs in English. The mean score of the overall items ( $M=3.62$ ;  $SD=1.29$ ) shows that the Saudi female EFL university learners usually identified experiencing anxiety when structuring paragraphs.

#### *Results of Anxiety attributed to Sentence Accuracy*

The participants were asked to rate their responses to their views about anxiety attributed to sentence accuracy (grammar - vocabulary –spelling) (see Table 3).

Table 3. EFL university learners' views of anxiety attributed to sentence accuracy

Items	The Scale					Mean	SD	Level
	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom	Never			
1. I do not have enough vocabulary to express my ideas.	76 (23.2)	76 (23.2)	73 (22.3)	41 (12.5)	61 (18.7)	3.20	1.41	Sometimes
2. I forget the English vocabulary.	30 (9.2)	63 (19.3)	101 (30.9)	69 (21.1)	64 (19.6)	2.77	1.23	Sometimes
3. I make spelling mistakes in writing.	38 (11.6)	45 (13.8)	107 (32.7)	71 (21.7)	66 (20.2)	2.75	1.25	Sometimes
4. I make noticeable grammatical errors.	26 (8.0)	45 (13.8)	78 (23.9)	83 (25.4)	95 (29.1)	2.46	1.23	Seldom
<b>Total</b>						2.80	1.28	Sometimes

As shown in Table 3, the results for item 1 ( $M=3.20$ ;  $SD=1.41$ ) reveal the participants "Sometimes" feel anxious about identifying the appropriate words to express their thoughts while writing paragraphs in English. The results for item 2 ( $M=2.77$ ;  $SD=1.23$ ) show that the participants can "Sometimes" experience anxiety, because they forget the appropriate English vocabulary. Likewise, the responses to item 3 ( $M=2.75$ ,  $SD=1.25$ ) illustrate that the learners "Sometimes" get anxious due to their spelling mistakes in writing. However, the results of item 4 ( $M=2.46$ ;  $SD=1.23$ ) show that they "Seldom" feel anxious about committing noticeable grammatical errors. The mean score of the overall items ( $M=2.80$ ;  $SD=1.28$ ) shows Saudi female EFL university learners found that writing proper sentences sometimes causes writing anxiety.

#### *Results of Anxiety attributed to Feedback, Corrections, & Grading*

The participants were asked to rate their responses to their views about anxiety attributed to feedback, corrections, and writing skills grading (see Table 4).

Table 4. EFL university learners' views of anxiety attributed to feedback, corrections & grading

Items	The Scale					Mean	SD	Level
	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom	Never			
1. I cannot accept the teacher's correction of every mistake.	185 (56.6)	52 (15.9)	37 (11.3)	16 (4.9)	37 (11.3)	4.02	1.38	Usually
2. I notice my teacher's negative facial expression while reading my paragraphs.	137 (41.9)	68 (20.8)	58 (17.7)	23 (7.0)	41 (12.5)	3.73	1.39	Usually
3. I fear being criticized.	134 (41.0)	75 (22.9)	49 (15.0)	34 (10.4)	35 (10.7)	3.73	1.37	Usually
4. I am given limited time for sharing my writing in class.	108 (33.0)	88 (26.9)	72 (22.0)	34 (10.4)	25 (7.6)	3.67	1.24	Usually
5. I cannot ask the teacher for any further help.	126 (38.5)	74 (22.6)	53 (16.2)	41 (12.5)	33 (10.1)	3.67	1.36	Usually
6. I am discouraged from writing.	117 (35.8)	85 (26.0)	57 (17.4)	21 (6.4)	47 (14.4)	3.62	1.40	Usually
7. I am afraid of the teacher's comments on my mistakes in writing.	121 (37.0)	76 (23.2)	49 (15.0)	34 (10.4)	47 (14.4)	3.58	1.44	Usually
8. I think that the time specified for writing is insufficient.	48 (14.7)	26 (8.0)	76 (23.2)	88 (26.9)	89 (27.2)	2.56	1.36	Seldom

9. I notice that my classmates write paragraphs better than me.	34 (10.4)	45 (13.8)	62 (19.0)	65 (19.9)	121 (37.0)	2.41	1.37	Seldom
10. I am asked to read my essay aloud.	39 (11.9)	40 (12.2)	51 (15.6)	54 (16.5)	143 (43.7)	2.32	1.44	Seldom
11. I have low scores in writing.	30 (9.2)	21 (6.4)	52 (15.9)	59 (18.0)	165 (50.5)	2.06	1.32	Seldom
<b>Total</b>						3.22	1.37	Sometimes

The results in Table 4 show the participants scored an anxiety level of "Usually" for 7 items as follows: accepting detailed teacher's correction of their work ( $M=4.02$ ;  $SD=1.38$ ), noticing negative facial expressions from the teacher while reading their writing ( $M=3.73$ ;  $SD=1.39$ ), fear of criticism ( $M=3.73$ ;  $SD=1.37$ ), being given enough time to share writing ( $M=3.67$ ;  $SD=1.24$ ), asking the teacher for help ( $M=3.67$ ;  $SD=1.36$ ), feeling discouraged from writing ( $M=3.62$ ;  $SD=1.40$ ), and being afraid of teacher's comments on writing mistakes ( $M=3.58$ ;  $SD=1.44$ ). Moreover, the results show that the participants scored an anxiety level of "Seldom" for another 4 items as follows: the time specified for writing is insufficient ( $M=2.56$ ;  $SD=1.36$ ), discovering that classmates' writing is of a higher standard ( $M=2.41$ ;  $SD=1.37$ ), being asked to read aloud ( $M=2.32$ ;  $SD=1.44$ ), and having low scores ( $M=2.06$ ;  $SD=1.32$ ). The mean score of the overall items ( $M=3.22$ ;  $SD=1.37$ ) showed that the Saudi female EFL university learners sometimes associated anxiety with feedback, corrections, and grading of their writing.

#### *Results of Anxiety attributed to Classroom Learning Environment*

The participants were asked to rate their responses concerning anxiety linked to the classroom environment (see Table 5).

*Table 5. EFL university learners' views of anxiety attributed to the classroom environment*

Items	The Scale					Mean	SD	Level
	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom	Never			
1. I do not participate in classroom writing activities.	143 (43.7)	68 (20.8)	55 (16.8)	29 (8.9)	32 (9.8)	3.80	1.34	Usually
2. I have a negative attitude and low motivation towards learning writing skills.	130 (39.8)	78 (23.9)	47 (14.4)	40 (12.2)	32 (9.8)	3.72	1.36	Usually
3. I get bored with the teacher's teaching methods of writing skills.	128 (39.1)	68 (20.8)	69 (21.1)	21 (6.4)	41 (12.5)	3.68	1.37	Usually
4. I have limited opportunities to practice writing in English.	89 (27.2)	64 (19.6)	70 (21.4)	34 (10.4)	70 (21.4)	3.21	1.49	Sometimes
5. I am forced to engage in pair or group work during the writing classroom.	51 (15.6)	24 (7.3)	71 (21.7)	54 (16.5)	127 (38.8)	2.44	1.45	Seldom

6.I rarely practice writing due to the large class size.	39 (11.9)	25 (7.6)	53 (16.2)	86 (26.3)	124 (37.9)	2.29	1.36	Seldom
7.I sit at the back of the class during writing lessons.	34 (10.4)	13 (4.0)	56 (17.1)	49 (15.0)	175 (53.5)	2.03	1.34	Seldom
8.I allow my classmates to laugh at my writing.	41 (12.5)	12 (3.7)	36 (11.0)	38 (11.6)	200 (61.2)	1.95	1.41	Seldom
<b>Total</b>						2.89	1.39	Sometimes

Table 5 illustrates participants' views regarding anxiety attributed to the classroom environment. The results for item 1 ( $M=2.78$ ;  $SD=1.49$ ) reveal that the learners "Usually" feel anxious about participating in classroom writing activities. Likewise, it is apparent that the responses to items 2 & 3 ( $M=3.72$ ,  $SD=1.36$ ;  $M=3.68$ ,  $SD=1.37$ ) indicate the participants are "Usually" anxious about having a negative attitude and low motivation towards learning writing skills and becoming bored with teaching methods. Meanwhile, the results show the participants "Sometimes" felt anxiety in writing classes when having limited opportunities to practice writing in English ( $M=3.21$ ;  $SD=1.49$ ). However, the responses to items 5, 6, 7, & 8 ( $M=2.44$ ,  $SD=1.45$ ;  $M=2.29$ ,  $SD=1.36$ ;  $M=2.03$ ,  $SD=1.34$ ;  $M=1.95$ ,  $SD=1.41$ ) indicate the participants are "Seldom" anxious about being instructed to engage in pair or group work, practicing writing due to the large class size, sitting at the back of the class, and tolerating their classmates' laughter about their writing. The mean score for the overall items ( $M=2.89$ ;  $SD=1.39$ ) shows that the Saudi female EFL university learners sometimes identified experiencing anxiety due to the classroom learning environment.

## DISCUSSION

The current descriptive research results explore Saudi female EFL university learners' anxiety with writing skills attributed to certain factors. In relation to the first research question, EFL learners' ability to structure paragraphs often causes anxiety, particularly following teachers' instructions, when brainstorming ideas, and in the areas of confidence developing writing skills and organizing ideas. This may be because EFL university learners have not been taught methods such as brainstorming, concept mapping, graphic organizers, and guiding questions. Another possible explanation is that EFL university learners are unwilling to perfect their writing skills they underestimate their importance in all areas. These results are supported by Alrabai (2014), who found that one of the causes of writing anxiety was "comprehension apprehension", manifesting as not understanding and following the teacher's instructions. Likewise, these results concur with those obtained by Aloairdhi (2019), whose study showed that the main causes of writing anxiety were difficulty generating ideas and low confidence. Similar results reported by Olanezhad (2015) revealed writing anxiety stemmed from students' lack of confidence about their accuracy. Moreover, Jawas (2019) revealed that organizing thoughts, developing a thesis statement, and creating content trigger anxiety during the writing process.

---

The results of the second research question reveal EFL university learners sometimes feel anxious about writing proper sentences with correct grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. EFL learners and non-native speakers may experience confusion when applying appropriate grammatical rules such as verb tenses, word order, connectors, determiners, and prepositions. Further, the frequent and detailed correction of their writing emphasizes their grammatical mistakes creating anxiety, as does challenges selecting appropriate vocabulary. Sometimes interference with the mother tongue, improper use of a dictionary, or literal translation from L1 to L2 leads to inaccurate vocabulary use, which can be a concern. Additionally, spelling mistakes can make EFL university learners anxious. Notably, learners usually focus on the content of the composition rather than its form. Additionally, some EFL learners may not follow spelling rules when writing essays at home. Instead, they rely on a computer spellcheck, and so in-class tasks they make numerous spelling errors, leading to anxiety.

These results seem consistent with Alharbi (2019) pre-test results, who reported that EFL undergraduate students were very weak in almost every aspect of writing English. In particular, grammar was considered the weakest aspect of students' writing followed by the mechanics (i.e., the punctuation, capitalization, and spelling), and lexical errors (i.e., nouns and pronouns, articles, and prepositions). However, in the post-test, significant differences were observed because of the improvement in students' writing after employing the special designed writing course and syllabus. Furthermore, the second dimension results are similar to Aloairdhi's (2019) finding that Saudi female university students had a moderate level of writing anxiety for various reasons, including grammar, time pressure, and lack of confidence.

One anticipated finding was that EFL university learners were frequently anxious about feedback, corrections, and grading. Moreover, they typically feel anxious about teacher's correction, comments, grading system negative facial expression, criticism, assistance, and the limited time assigned for sharing writing with classmates. These results could be attributed to the fact that EFL learners seem dissatisfied with their instructors' correction and different feedback types, such as immediate, delayed, individual, group, instructor, and peer feedback. Another possible explanation may be that some instructors provide correction and feedback in a threatening, non-supportive, and discouraging manner that reduces learners confidence creating discomfort, as may grading systems such as customized writing rubrics.

These results reflect those of Hashemi (2011), who argued that language learners often experience anxiety due to fear of being assessed and losing marks. Likewise, Negari and Rezaabadi (2012) discovered that grading contributed to writing anxiety. Similarly, these results agree with those obtained by Alrabai (2014), who found that "communication anxiety" refers to students' anxieties about being negatively assessed by their teacher and peers contributes to writing anxiety. Elsewhere, Olanezhad (2015), who analyzed students' responses to open-ended questions, found that writing anxiety stemmed from multiple sources, with concern about the teacher's being one. More recently, Arindra and Ardi (2020) revealed that using writing scoring rubrics and notifying L2 students beforehand about assessment criteria

reduced writing anxiety. Conversely, however, Liu and Ni (2015) reported that students in their study were neither fearful nor anxious about their English writing being graded.

Contrary to expectations, Saudi female EFL university learners rarely seemed anxious about the time specified for writing, peer competition, reading compositions aloud, and getting low scores. This discrepancy could be due to the teacher's organization of class activities and monitoring of the writing process. Another possible explanation is that the teacher might establish a non-competitive learning environment and allow students to read their essays aloud to share ideas. Another contributory factor might be that the criteria for success are balanced, assessment is authentic and never punitive, and students feel secure about their scores.

These results are inconsistent with those obtained by Hashemi (2011), who reported that fear of losing marks causes language anxiety among language learners. They are also inconsistent with Aloairdhi (2019), who found that time pressure causes writing anxiety, and Jawas (2019) found that the teacher and peer competition contribute to writing anxiety.

Concerning the fourth research question results, the Saudi female EFL university learners were sometimes reportedly anxious about the classroom learning environment. They stated that they are frequently anxious about participating in classroom writing activities, having negative attitudes and low motivation to learn writing skills, and getting bored with the teacher's teaching methods. There are several possible explanations for these results. It seems probable that they arise from limited instructor-learner interaction and communication and a disability to control for negative issues that might trigger boredom, fear, or procrastination. These results may also be due to the teachers' use of traditional teaching methods.

These results are consistent with those obtained by Senko (2016), suggesting that writing anxiety is linked to other aspects, such as attitudes toward writing skills and motivation to write. They also concur with Yetis's (2017) finding that students' competency levels, attitudes about writing, and composition are potential sources of writing anxiety. Moreover, these results agree with Dhanya and Alamelu (2019), who identified the factors that affect writing proficiency inside the classroom, including motivation, positive environment, assessment techniques, types of provided feedback, and the teacher-student relationship. The findings of Sabti et al. (2019) also support those reported, observing that Arab EFL students with high motivation and self-efficacy performed better in writing performance.

In addition, the results showed that the participants are sometimes anxious about the limited opportunities to practice writing. However, they demonstrated that being forced to engage in pair or group work while writing, rarely practicing due to the large class size, sitting at the back of the class, and permitting peer annoyance are seldom considered factors that cause writing anxiety. This may be because EFL students rarely consider traditional teaching methods that seldom engage them in pair or group activities as a cause of writing anxiety. Another factor in these results is that EFL students do not consider the classroom learning environment, including pair or group works, large class size, seating, and peer bullying as obstacles to writing. These

results are supported by Jawas (2019) findings, which confirmed that the writing teaching strategies adopted lead to reduce writing anxiety. Meanwhile, these results are inconsistent with those of Abdala and Elnadeef (2019), who found that EFL Saudi university students feel anxious about their colleagues' jest comments.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

When practicing writing skills, writing anxiety can be defined as learners' feelings of tension, worries, and fear . In contrast to native speakers, EFL learners may encounter several specific difficulties that lead to anxiety during writing tasks. Hence, the current study aimed to explore EFL university learners' anxiety in writing skills attributed to the following factors: structuring paragraphs, sentence accuracy, feedback, corrections, grading, and classroom learning environment.

The researchers formulated a questionnaire that consisted of closed questions. The results show that most Saudi female EFL university learners sometimes and usually experienced anxiety during writing tasks. Moreover, the results reveal that the majority of Saudi female EFL university learners felt that paragraph structuring usually causes them writing anxiety. The second major finding showed that the learners sometimes feel anxious about writing proper sentences with correct grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. The study demonstrated an unexpected finding, in that EFL university learners ranged between usually and seldom being anxious about feedback, corrections, and grading in writing tasks. Finally, the results also showed that Saudi female EFL university learners ranged between usually and seldom anxious about the classroom environment. Hence, one general conclusion that can be drawn from the findings is that the majority of Saudi female EFL university learners only felt a moderate level of writing anxiety, as they reported feeling anxious occasionally during writing tasks.

Furthermore, based on the current study's findings and several previous studies (Alharbi, 2019; Alrabai, 2014; Jawas, 2019; Negari & Rezaabadi, 2012; Olanezhad, 2015; Sabti et al., 2019; Yetis, 2017) some practical recommendations have been proposed. Firstly, EFL learners should not be solely responsible for developing their writing skills; instructors should teach writing through guidance and support, providing opportunities for learners to practice mechanical writing drills. Secondly, EFL instructors should attempt to integrate creative teaching strategies to enhance learners' writing proficiency, such as mobile writing applications, e-dictionaries, oral presentations, structured peer tutoring, debate, and group discussion. Thirdly, instructors should establish a writing community where EFL learners can build confidence, promote motivation, share visions of their work, and exchange constructive peer feedback. Fourthly, instructors should vary the techniques and strategies they use to reflect on learners' writing, such as peer editing, instructor's correction, feedback, classroom observation, peer conferencing, a self-editing checklist, and incorporating remedial activities. Fifthly, instructors should design appropriate rubrics for assessment where they take into account the variety of writing purposes (personal narrative, story, descriptive, factual report, letter, persuasive) and sub-skill in focus (content, spelling, punctuation, grammar, eligibility, organization). Finally, it

is recommended that instructors discuss writing anxiety with the learners to be aware of anxiety and the reasons for their feelings of insecurity in the writing classroom.

It is recommended that further studies are conducted to validate the relationships between writing anxiety and psychological factors such as satisfaction, metacognitive awareness, and self-esteem. Further investigation and experimentation into the effect of teaching strategies, assessment techniques, and writing anxiety are strongly recommended.

### **Limitations of the study**

The current study has resulted in several significant findings. However, the participants consisted exclusively of Saudi female EFL university learners at Taibah University; therefore, the potential impact of gender on the findings is beyond this study's scope. Furthermore, the study was conducted only among Saudi female EFL university learners in Madinah. Further studies on a broader scale in the Saudi context are encouraged to generalize the results. Moreover, this study has only provided data on EFL university learners' views regarding writing anxiety; a more comprehensive study that includes EFL learners' and instructors' views and concerns could be conducted to add to the research body in this area.

### **Acknowledgments**

The researchers wish to profoundly thank the Saudi female EFL university learners involved in this study for their high responsiveness level during the first and second semesters of the 2019-2020 academic year. Thanks are also extended to Dr. Maram Samman, the English Department deputy head at Taibah University, Madinah, Saudi Arabia, for her invaluable administrative support during data collection.

### **Biography**

Hayat Alamri is an Associate Professor of English who was named a Senior Fellow by the Higher Education Academy in 2016. She has a plethora of expertise teaching at university level, having worked with undergraduates, high diploma, and master's students for many years. Hayat has published research papers in international peer-reviewed publications and has attended a number of language conferences, workshops, and symposia.

Ashwag Alanazi is a Master's degree student at the College of Education at Taibah University. She graduated in 2012 from King Salman University at Alkharj, majoring in English literature. She worked at a private school as an EFL teacher. She then taught as an EFL teacher in a community college in Alula city for a year. Her goal is to complete a Ph.D. degree. She is interested in reading books.

Sarah Al-Rashedi received her bachelor's degree in the English Language in 2013 from Hail University. She completed her Master's degree in 2019 at the College of Education at Taibah University. She worked as an EFL teacher at an intermediate school in Hail. She is interested in the Arts and politics. Her ambition is to become a respected professional in EFL teaching.



---

**References**

- Abdala, A. & Elnadeef, E. (2019). English language anxiety and stress among Saudi students in the first year at College of Sciences and Arts in Dharan Aljanoob. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation (IJLLT)*, 2(1), 270–275. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2019.2.1.33>
- Al-Mukdad, S. (2019). Investigating English academic writing problems encountered by Arab International University students. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 9(3), 300–306. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0903.07>
- Alharbi, M. (2019). EFL university students' voice on challenges and solution in learning academic writing. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(3), 576–587. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v8i3.15276>
- Aloairdhi, N. (2019). Writing anxiety among Saudi female learners at some Saudi Universities. *English Language Teaching*, 12(9), 55–65. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v12n9p55>
- Alrabai, F. (2014). A model of foreign language anxiety in the Saudi EFL context. *English Language Teaching*, 7(7), 82–101. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v7n7p82>
- Anderman, E. M. & Sinatra, G. M. (2012). *The challenges of teaching and learning about science in the 21st century: Exploring the abilities and constraints of adolescent learners*. 48(1), 1–50.
- Anh, D. T. (2019). EFL student's writing skills: Challenges and remedies. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 9(6 Ser. I.), 74–84. <https://doi.org/10.9790/7388-0906017484>
- Arindra, M. & Ardi, P. (2020). The correlation between students' writing anxiety and the use of writing assessment rubrics. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 13(1), 76–93.
- Briesmaster, M. & Etchegaray, P. (2017). Coherence and cohesion in EFL students' writing production: The impact of a metacognition-based intervention. *Ikala*, 22(2), 183–202. <https://doi.org/10.17533/udea.ikala.v22n02a02>
- Cheng, Y-S, Horwitz, E. & Schallert, D. (1999). Language anxiety: Differentiating writing and speaking components. *Language Learning*, 49(3), 417–446. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0023-8333.00095>
- Cheng, Y.-S. (2004). A measure of second language writing anxiety: Scale development and preliminary validation. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 13, 313–335. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2004.07.001>
- Dhanya, M. & Alamelu, C. (2019). Factors influencing the acquisition of writing skills. *International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering*, 8(7C2), 259–263.
- Fareed, M., Ashraf, A. & Bilal, M. (2016). ESL learners' writing skills: Problems, factors and suggestions. *Journal of Education & Social Sciences*, 4(2:1), 83–94. <https://doi.org/10.20547/jess0421604201>
- Flynn, N. & Stainthorp, R. (2006). *The learning and teaching of reading and writing*. John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Fraenkel, J. & Wallen, N. (2009). Statistics in perspective. In *How to design and evaluate*

*research in education*. McGraw-Hill.

- Hashemi, M. (2011). Language stress and anxiety among the English language learners. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 30, 1811–1816. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.10.349>
- Herdi, H. (2015). An analysis on factors influencing the students' writing skill. *Jurnal ELT-Lectura*, 2(2), 19–22. <https://doi.org/10.31849/elt-lectura.v2i2.465>
- Hossain, M. I. (2015). *Teaching productive skills to the students: A secondary level scenario*. [Unpublished Master Thesis]. BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- Jalaluddin, I. (2019). Process approach in teaching of ESL writing: Teacher's assistance and its practicality in real classroom. *Journal Of Research, Policy & Practice of Teachers & Teacher Education*, 9(2), 66–78. <https://doi.org/10.37134/jrpptte.vol9.no2.6.2019>
- Jawas, U. (2019). Writing anxiety among Indonesian EFL students: Factors and strategies. *International Journal of Instruction*, 12(4), 733–746. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2019.12447a>
- Karakaya, I. & Ülper, H. (2011). Developing a writing anxiety scale and examining writing anxiety based on various variables. *Kuram ve Uygulamada Egitim Bilimleri*, 11(2), 703–707.
- Liu, M. & Ni, H. (2015). Chinese University EFL learners' foreign language writing anxiety: Pattern, effect and causes. *English Language Teaching*, 8(3), 46–58. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v8n3p46>
- Maolida, E. & Mustika, G. (2018). Students' writing process for project Ibunka: A case study of EFL writers. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 3(3), 203–215. <https://doi.org/10.21462/jeltl.v3i3.147>
- Matsumoto, D. (2009). *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Negari, G. & Rezaabadi, O. (2012). Too nervous to write? The relationship between anxiety and EFL writing. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(12), 2578–2586. <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.2.12.2578-2586>
- Nodoushan, M.-A. (2014). Assessing writing: A review of the main trends. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 1(2), 128–138. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v1i2.1831>
- Olanezhad, M. (2015). A comparative study of writing anxiety among Iranian university students majoring translation, teaching and literature. *English Language Teaching*, 8(3), 59–70. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v8n3p59>
- Pariyanto & Pradipta, B. (2019). Factors influencing an EFL learner's proficiency: An English teacher's perspective. *Anaphora: Journal of Language, Literary and Cultural Studies*, 2(2), 89–95. <https://doi.org/10.30996/anaphora.v2i2.3369>
- Sabti, A., Rashid, S., Nimehchisalem, V. & Darmi, R. (2019). The impact of writing anxiety, writing achievement motivation, and writing self-efficacy on writing Performance: A correlational study of Iraqi tertiary EFL learners. *SAGE Open*, 9(4), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019894289>
- Senko, C. (2016). Achievement goal theory: A story of early promises, eventual discords, and future possibilities. In K. Wentzel & D. Miele (Eds), *Handbook of motivation at school* (Vol. 2, Issue March, pp. 75–95). Routledge, Taylor & Francis.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315773384>

Sulistyo, T., Mukminatien, N., Cahyono, B. & Saukah, A. (2019). Enhancing learners' writing performance through Blog-assisted language learning. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning*, 14(9), 61–73.

<https://doi.org/10.3991/IJET.V14I09.9535>

Yetis, V. (2017). Sources of Writing Anxiety: A Study on French Language Teaching Students. *International Education Studies*, 10(6), 72–86.

<https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v10n6p72>