

EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENT'S WRITING ANXIETY IN ESSAY DEVELOPMENT

Hanna Sundari¹, Rina Husnaini Febriyanti²

^{1,2}Universitas Indraprasta PGRI

¹hanna.sundari@gmail.com, ²rhfebriyanti@gmail.com

Abstrak

Diantara banyaknya penelitian terkait kecemasan menulis dalam konteks pembelajaran menulis bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing, penyelidikan mengenai kecemasan menulis dalam penulisan esai argumentatif masih cukup terbatas. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki tingkat kecemasan dan manifestasi kecemasan mahasiswa program sarjana dalam penyusunan esai argumentatif. Dengan dipandu oleh kerangka riset kuantitatif deskriptif, 53 mahasiswa diminta untuk mengisi *the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI)* dalam sebuah survey skala kecil. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa 78% mahasiswa mengalami tingkat kecemasan sedang ketika terlibat dalam pengembangan esai argumentatif, dan hanya sebagian kecil yang melaporkan tingkat kecemasan tinggi atau rendah (11%). Analisis tingkat kecemasan seluruh responden menunjukkan tren kecemasan sedang. Selain itu, kecemasan kognitif merupakan kategori yang dominan, diikuti oleh kecemasan somatik dan perilaku penghindaran.

Kata Kunci: Penulisan Argumentatif; Kecemasan Menulis; Menulis Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing.

Abstract

Among the numerous research of writing anxiety in EFL writing instruction, the investigation of writing anxiety during the creation of argumentative essay remains limited. This current research, therefore, was purposed to examine the levels and specific manifestations of writing anxiety for the development of argumentative essay. Guided by descriptive quantitative research framework, 53 university students in writing course were asked to fill out the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) in a small-scale survey. The results show that 78% of students experienced moderate levels of anxiety when engaged in the development of argumentative essays, with only a small percentage reporting high or low level of anxiety (11%). An analysis of the anxiety levels across all respondents revealed a prevailing trend of moderate anxiety. Moreover, cognitive anxiety was the predominant category, followed by somatic anxiety and avoidance behavior respectively.

Keywords: Argumentative Writing, Writing Anxiety, EFL Writing.



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INTRODUCTION

Language anxiety can be conceptualized into two ways: “1) a manifestation of other types of anxiety (i.e. test anxiety, public speaking anxiety) in language learning context and 2) a situation-specific anxiety” (Horwitz et al., 2010, p. 96). Then, for EFL learners, learning English may constantly bring a subjective feeling of nervousness, apprehension and anxiety (Kusumaningputri et al., 2018). Particularly in EFL writing context, writing activity and task are commonly viewed as demanding and difficult among EFL learners (Jawas, 2019) since it requires not only mental and cognitive processes (Feliks, 2007) but also involves emotional and affective factors (Salikin, 2019), such as anxiety and apprehension. Feeling fear and discomfort to start writing activity and to complete the task may determine the process of writing development and the writing product. Writing anxiety, therefore, can be one of the psychological barriers in writing development (Kurniasih & Saukah, 2021), and it is believed to give negative effects towards learners’ writing performance and skills (Hartono & Maharani, 2020; Hu, 2022). Moreover, the issue of writing anxiety in EFL writing instruction has been a subject of extensive research both in the international contexts (Asmari, 2013; Cheng, 2004; Hu, 2022; Kaygisi & Sonuclari, 2019) and Indonesian contexts (Hartono & Maharani, 2020; Haryanti et al., 2022; Inggarwati et al., 2022; Kurniasih & Saukah, 2021; Yanti & Hidayati, 2021).

The construct of anxiety is multifaced, including trait anxiety, state anxiety, and achievement anxiety (Horwitz, 2010). To be more precise in EFL writing, writing anxiety can be situated as a state of fear in writing process, such as mental condition as a response to writing (Yanti & Hidayati, 2021), caused by the inability to achieve the writing requirement and can be triggered by internal and external factors (Liestyana et al., 2020; Lubis & Rahmawati, 2019), such as difficulty in vocabulary and lack of confidence to meet the task requirement (Horwitz et al., 2010). The characteristics can be a wide variety of a persistent, apprehensive, and pessimistic feelings about writing (Jawas, 2019). Furthermore, scholars have explored the multifaceted nature of writing anxiety, encompassing both affective and cognitive dimensions (Cheng, 2004). Within the broader construct of writing anxiety, researchers have identified distinct dimensions, including somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, and avoidance behavior (Cheng, 2004; Horwitz, 2001). Somatic anxiety pertains to the physiological manifestations of anxiety, such as tension, nervousness, and trembling. Cognitive anxiety involves the mental challenges associated with writing, including fears of negative evaluation and concerns about language proficiency (Cheng, 2004). Avoidance behavior encompasses strategies employed by learners to evade writing tasks due to anxiety (Horwitz, 2001).

While second language writing anxiety has been widely acknowledged, its specific manifestations in the development of argumentative essays within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university context have received limited attention. In fact, argumentative writing promotes the students to stand and evaluate their interpretative claims by applying disciplinary strategies and evaluative standard (Murtadho, 2021). This type of writing involves the writers in critical thinking and articulation of arguments in appropriate and correct manners (McKinley, 2015) and it is considered an essential mode of academic writing in higher education (Zhu, 2001). However, the students at all levels of education face difficulties and challenges when engaging writing argumentative essay (Juhana et al., 2023; Saprina et al., 2020; Suhartoyo et al., 2020) including university levels of education. The task of constructing argumentative essays requires students to not only demonstrate language proficiency but also engage in critical thinking, persuasive

communication, and adherence to academic conventions (Murtadho, 2021; Schneer, 2014). The unique demands of this genre may amplify writing anxiety, necessitating a focused exploration.

Writing anxiety, particularly in the context of second language acquisition, has been a subject of growing concern in educational research (Irawati et al., 2022; Kurniasih & Saukah, 2021; Prasetyaningrum et al., 2021). Despite the increasing acknowledgment of its impact on language learners, there remains a significant research gap, particularly concerning the specific challenges posed by writing anxiety in the development of argumentative essays within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university setting. While several studies have explored general aspects of second language writing anxiety (Hartono & Maharani, 2020; Haryanti et al., 2022; Inggarwati et al., 2022; Kusumaningputri et al., 2018), the specific exploration and findings related to argumentative essay development in the university context remain underexplored. The scarcity of comprehensive research on writing anxiety, particularly in argumentative essay writing within an EFL context (Asih, 2022), highlights the need for a focused investigation. This present research aims to address this gap by providing an examination of writing anxiety levels among university students during the development of argumentative essay. The study seeks to uncover the specific dimensions of somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, and avoidance behavior (Cheng, 2004; Horwitz, 2001) that students experience within this academic writing task. To guide this exploration, the following research question is addressed: What are the levels of specific manifestations of second language writing anxiety experienced by university students after engaging in argumentative essay writing?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the levels of second language writing anxiety among university students in the context of academic writing, particularly in the development of argumentative essays. The selection of a quantitative design aligns with the study's focus on measuring and describing the levels and manifestations of writing anxiety in second/foreign language context. A cross-sectional approach with a small-scale survey was employed (Creswell, 2015; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009), collecting data at a single point in time to provide a snapshot of participants' writing anxiety experiences in argumentative essay development.

The respondents in this study comprised 53 university students enrolled in an academic writing course, specifically in the sixth semester. The selection of respondents was purposeful, focusing on those actively engaged in the task of composing argumentative essay. Among them, 44 were female, and 9 were male, reflecting a diverse representation. The age range of the respondents spanned from 19 to 23 years old (ages $M= 21.08$), contributing to a varied demographic within the study cohort. The demographic information of the respondents can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. The Demographical Information of Respondents

Gender		Age	
Female	44	19 years old	1
	83%	20 years old	11
Male	9	21 years old	22
	17%	22 years old	17
Total	53	23 years old	2

The respondents were tasked with writing argumentative essay as one of their assignments during academic writing course. After the completion of the writing task, they completed the questionnaire to gauge their levels of writing anxiety. To measure second language writing anxiety, the study employed and modified the questionnaire from the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) developed by Cheng (2004) to the context of developing argumentative essay. The SLWAI is a well-established instrument designed to assess various dimensions of writing anxiety among second language learners. It comprises three subscales:

- a. Somatic Anxiety (8 items): Reflecting physical manifestations of anxiety.
- b. Cognitive Anxiety (12 items): Addressing anxiety related to cognitive processes in writing.
- c. Avoidance Behavior (7 items): Capturing behaviors associated with avoiding writing tasks due to anxiety.

This questionnaire was administered electronically using Google Form after the task submission to ensure uniformity in responses. To ensure the reliability of the SLWAI instrument, Cronbach's alpha was computed. The obtained Cronbach's alpha value was 0.9345, indicating a high level of internal consistency. This substantial reliability coefficient suggests that the items within each subscale and the overall instrument consistently measure the intended constructs (somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, and avoidance behavior) (Taherdoost, 2018).

Moreover, for analyzing the data, descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and potentially frequencies, was computed for each subscale of the SLWAI questionnaire. These statistics provide a comprehensive overview of the participants' level of writing anxiety. The analysis focuses on summarizing and presenting the main features of the dataset without engaging in inferential calculations. Furthermore, this study adhered to ethical principles, ensuring the confidentiality, voluntary nature of respondents' involvement, and their identities were protected throughout the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research aimed to investigate the levels and specific manifestations of writing anxiety experienced by university students during the development of argumentative essays. The study focused on assessing: 1) students' levels of writing anxiety and 2) specific manifestation of writing anxiety across three distinct subscales: somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, and avoidance behavior. The findings of this study are presented through a descriptive analysis, providing an in-depth examination of the respondents' experiences in each of the identified subscales.

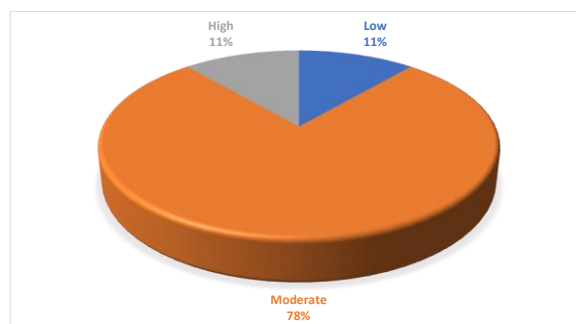


Figure 1. Students' Level of Writing Anxiety

Figure 1 illustrates that, when students are involved in the development of argumentative essays, a significant majority (78%) experience moderate levels of anxiety and apprehension. In contrast, only a small percentage reported high or low levels of anxiety (11%). This suggests that the task requirements and the process of developing argumentative essays pose difficulties and challenges for students. However, the majority of students demonstrate the ability to overcome these challenges, ultimately completing the task successfully.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics by 3 Subscales of Writing Anxiety

No	Subscale	Mean	S.D.	Level of Anxiety	Rank
1.	Somatic anxiety	2.745	0.77	Moderate	2
2.	Cognitive anxiety	2.862	0.81	Moderate	1
3.	Avoidance Behavior	2.633	0.84	Moderate	3

The findings derived from the descriptive analysis in Table 2, illuminate a significant aspect of this study—every respondent reported experiencing anxiety during the engagement with argumentative essays. The results underscore a prevailing trend of moderate anxiety levels across all respondents. This implies a shared experience of anxiety, reflecting the inherent challenges associated with the process of developing argumentative essays within the university setting. Upon closer inspection of the three subscales, cognitive anxiety emerges as the predominant category, registering a mean score (M) of 2.862, followed by somatic anxiety (M=2.745) and avoidance behavior (M=2.633). This indicates that respondents, on average, reported a higher level of cognitive anxiety compared to somatic anxiety and avoidance behavior. The prominence of cognitive anxiety suggests a noteworthy focus on the mental aspects and cognitive processes involved in the task of constructing argumentative essays.

Delving into the subscale of somatic anxiety, the analysis reveals that 7 out of 8 statements garnered a moderate level of anxiety among participants, as depicted in Table 3. This suggests that respondents encountered physical manifestations, including nervousness, trembling, tension, panic, and worry when tasked with composing argumentative essays. Examining the specific aspects of somatic anxiety, the most pronounced anxiety was associated with the evaluation process (M=3.09). Respondents expressed heightened anxiety levels when anticipating the evaluation of their essays. This indicates that the prospect of assessment significantly contributes to the somatic anxiety experienced during the writing process.

Table 3. Subscale: Somatic anxiety

No	Statement	Mean	S.D.	Level of Anxiety
1.	While I am writing argumentative essay in English, I am nervous	2.962	0.61	Moderate
2.	I feel my heart pounding when I am writing argumentative essay	2.490	0.79	Moderate
3.	While writing argumentative essay in English, I feel worried and uneasy If I know they will be evaluated.	3.094	0.68	High
4.	I tremble or perspire when I write English argumentative essay under time pressure	2.830	0.82	Moderate

5	I often feel panic when I write English argumentative essay under time constraint	2.962	0.73	Moderate
6	I freeze up when unexpectedly asked to write English argumentative essay	2.698	0.74	Moderate
7	I feel my body rigid and tense when I write English argumentative essay	2.415	0.74	Moderate
8	I do not feel comfortable and at ease when writing English argumentative essay	2.509	0.74	Moderate

Looking into the subscale of cognitive anxiety particularly, the respondents in this study indicated that 10 out of 12 statements garnered a moderate level of anxiety in the cognitive process during the development of argumentative essays, as presented in Table 4. This result points to the cognitive challenges faced by respondents, encompassing difficulties in idea generation, sentence patterns, encountering unclear and blank thoughts, and struggling with jumbled ideas. Exploring specific areas of cognitive anxiety, the most prominent sources of concern included the evaluation process, the fear of receiving a very poor grade, and anxiety related to adhering to essay conventions (M=3.151 and M=3.113). These aspects emerged as central contributors to the cognitive anxiety experienced by participants throughout the essay-writing endeavor.

Table 4. Subscale: Cognitive anxiety

No	Statement	Mean	S.D.	Level of Anxiety
1	While writing argumentative essay in English, I often worry that I would use expression and sentence patterns improperly	2.981	0,79	Moderate
2	My mind goes blank when I start to work on English argumentative essay	2.698	0.88	Moderate
3	I worry that my English argumentative essay is a lot worse than others	2.981	0.86	Moderate
4	If my English argumentative essay is to be evaluated, I would worry about getting a very poor grade	3.151	0.79	High
5	When I write English argumentative essay, my ideas and words do not flow smoothly	2.868	0.83	Moderate
6	My thoughts become jumbled when I write English argumentative essay under time pressure	2.943	0.66	Moderate
7	While I write English argumentative essay, I often worry that the way I express and organize my ideas do not conform to the norm of English writing	3.113	0.57	High
8	I am afraid that the other students would deride (mock) my English argumentative essay if they read it	2.491	0.91	Moderate
9	When I write English argumentative essay, my mind is not very clear	2.698	0.72	Moderate
10	I worry about what others think of my English argumentative essay	2.698	0.88	Moderate
11	I am afraid of my English argumentative essay being chosen as a sample for discussion in class	2.811	0.78	Moderate
12	I am afraid that my English argumentative essay would be rated as very poor	2.906	0.76	Moderate

In examining the subscale of avoidance behavior, respondents predominantly reported a moderate level of engagement across all provided statements, see Table 5. Notably, the highest level of avoidance behavior was associated with respondents' attempts to excuse themselves from writing argumentative essays ($M= 3.113$). This result suggests that respondents demonstrated a moderate inclination to avoid the task of composing argumentative essays, with the primary motivation being the fulfillment of course assignments rather than an intrinsic interest in the essay-writing process.

Table 5. Subscale: Avoidance Behavior

No	Statement	Mean	S.D.	Level of Anxiety
1.	I often choose to not write down my thoughts in English	2.377	0,76	Moderate
2.	I do my best to avoid situations in which I have to write in English	2.792	0.88	Moderate
3.	I usually do my best to avoid writing English essays	2.735	0.92	Moderate
4.	Unless I have no choice, I would not use English to write essays/ compositions	2.433	0.79	Moderate
5	I would do my best to excuse myself if asked to write argumentative essay	3.113	0.66	High
6	I seek every possible chance to not write English argumentative essay outside the class	2.528	0.89	Moderate
7	Whenever possible, I would not use English for my writing essay/ composition	2.452	0.72	Moderate

As engaged in the creation of argumentative essays, a noteworthy 78% of students encounter a moderate degree of anxiety, while only a small proportion (11%) express high or low levels of anxiety. A similar finding was also found in a study by Asih (2022) that reported 72% of university students gained moderate level of anxiety in writing argumentative essay. This indicates that the demands and processes involved in constructing argumentative essays present challenges for students. Nevertheless, the majority of students exhibit the capability to overcome these challenges, ultimately accomplishing the task successfully.

Analyzing the three subscales in the present research, cognitive anxiety stands out as the dominant category, with a mean score (M) of 2.862, followed by somatic anxiety ($M= 2.745$) and avoidance behavior ($M= 2.633$). Every participant in this research acknowledged experiencing anxiety while working on argumentative essays, indicating a prevailing trend of moderate anxiety levels. This finding is consisted to the research by Asih (2022) which demonstrated cognitive anxiety as the highest mean score. This shared experience highlights the inherent challenges associated with the process of crafting argumentative essays in a university setting. On average, participants reported higher cognitive anxiety levels, emphasizing a significant focus on the mental aspects and cognitive processes involved in constructing argumentative essays.

Examining the somatic anxiety subscale, the findings indicate that 7 out of 8 statements received a moderate anxiety level among participants. This implies that respondents faced physical manifestations such as nervousness, trembling, tension, panic, and worry while engaged in the creation of argumentative essays. Focusing on specific aspects of somatic anxiety, the most prominent anxiety was linked to the evaluation process ($M=3.09$). A similar manifestation was also found in previous research by Asih

(2022). Participants displayed heightened anxiety levels when anticipating the assessment of their essays, emphasizing the substantial impact of evaluation on the somatic anxiety experienced throughout the writing task.

Analyzing the cognitive anxiety subscale, participants in this study expressed moderate anxiety levels in 10 out of 12 statements related to cognitive processes while developing argumentative essays. This indicates the cognitive challenges encountered by respondents, involving issues with idea generation, sentence structures, facing unclear and blank thoughts, and dealing with jumbled ideas. Examining specific areas of cognitive anxiety, the most notable concerns revolved around the evaluation process, the fear of receiving a very poor grade, and anxiety regarding adherence to essay conventions ($M= 3.151$ and $M=3.113$). These factors emerged as significant contributors to the cognitive anxiety experienced by participants throughout the process of essay writing. Recognizing the prevalence of moderate anxiety levels and the dominance of cognitive anxiety offers valuable insights for potential interventions. Providing targeted support for critical thinking and essay structuring skills can perhaps be beneficial in mitigating anxiety levels among university students engaged in argumentative writing tasks. Regarding the avoidance behavior subscale, participants mainly indicated a moderate level of involvement across all provided. Specifically, the most pronounced avoidance behavior was linked to respondents' efforts to excuse themselves from writing argumentative essays ($M= 3.113$). This outcome implies that participants exhibited a moderate tendency to evade the task of composing argumentative essays, primarily motivated by meeting course assignment requirements rather than a genuine interest in the essay-writing process.

CONCLUSION

This current research aims to examine the university students' levels and manifestations of writing anxiety during engagement in development of argumentative essays. Data analysis demonstrated that the majority of the students gained moderate level of writing anxiety. Furthermore, cognitive anxiety appeared as the dominant category of anxiety, followed by somatic anxiety and avoidance behavior, respectively. This indicates that university students exhibited anxiety during the writing development of argumentative essay though they seem to overcome these challenges. The task requirements and process in creation of argumentative essay may bring difficulties and feeling of tension and worry; however, the students can successfully complete the task.

From the research findings, the dominance of cognitive anxiety indicates a pronounced emphasis on the mental dimensions and cognitive processes inherent in the task of constructing argumentative essays. This insight can inform targeted support and interventions aimed at addressing specific cognitive challenges associated with the writing process. Strategies focusing on cognitive aspects, such as critical thinking skills and effective essay structuring, may prove instrumental in alleviating cognitive anxiety among university students engaged in argumentative writing tasks. Moreover, understanding the specific facets of somatic anxiety, particularly the elevated concern related to evaluation, provides valuable insights for designing targeted support strategies. Interventions focused on decreasing anxiety associated with evaluation, such as providing clear evaluation criteria and fostering a supportive feedback environment, might prove beneficial in enhancing the overall writing experience for university students engaged in argumentative essay tasks.

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