

**FOREIGN LANGUAGE WRITING ANXIETY IN RELATION TO STUDENTS'
ACHIEVEMENT,
(HUBUNGAN KEGELISAHAN MENULIS DALAM BAHASA ASING PADA PRESTASI
SISWA)**

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Abstract

Foreign language writing anxiety is a matter that cannot be avoided by the majority of EFL learners. In case of English Department students of Faculty of Letters, Jember University, they also experience such thing. This research examines the role of three levels of writing anxiety (high, moderate and low) in giving effect on students' achievement. The participants of this research are three English department students. By applying the questionnaire of Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) (Cheng, 2014), the levels of writing anxiety are obtained. Besides using SLWAI, semi-structured interview is also conducted to get more in-depth information from the students who represent high anxiety level, moderate anxiety level and low anxiety level. In accordance with students' achievement, the students' final scores on writing will be also used as the data. The results of this study show that three levels of anxiety have two sides of effect, negative and positive. The negative effect takes place when the students cannot exploit the anxiety which they have. Even for the students who have very low anxiety level, they also have the potential receiving bad scores if they are unable to employ their anxiety. Employing anxiety means the students can alter anxiety into something useful, since actually anxiety can function as a controller to avoid making error as well as mistake. If the students are success to get the benefit of anxiety, it means anxiety provides positive effect. All in all, anxiety does not always give bad influence, but it also contributes something beneficial for the students when they are learning a language. The two sides of anxiety depend on how the action of students toward it.

Keywords: *foreign language writing anxiety, anxiety levels, student's achievement*

Kegelisahan menulis dalam bahasa kedua adalah suatu hal yang tidak dapat dihindari oleh pelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing. Dalam kasus mahasiswa jurusan bahasa Inggris Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Jember, mereka juga mengalami hal demikian. Penelitian ini menguji peran tiga tingkat kegelisahan menulis (tinggi, sedang dan rendah) dalam memberikan pengaruh pada prestasi siswa. Peserta dalam penelitian ini adalah tiga mahasiswa jurusan bahasa Inggris. Dengan menerapkan kuisioner 'econd Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) (Cheng, 2014), level-level kegelisahan ketika menulis dapat diperoleh. Selain menggunakan SLWAI, wawancara setengah tersruktur juga akan diadakan untuk memperoleh lebih banyak informasi mendalam dari siswa yang mewakili tingkat kegelisahan tinggi, tingkat kegelisahan sedang dan tingkat kegelisahan rendah. Sesuai dengan prestasi siswa, nilai akhir siswa pada mata kuliah writing juga akan digunakan sebagai data. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa tiga level pada kegelisahan memiliki dua sisi pengaruh, negatif dan positif. Efek negative terjadi ketika siswa tidak dapat memanfaatkan kegelisahan yang mereka punya. Bahkan untuk siswa yang memiliki tingkat kegelisahan yang sangat rendah, mereka juga mempunyai potensi mendapat nilai yang buruk jika mereka tidak sanggup menggunakan kegelisahan mereka. Memanfaatkan kegelisahan disini artinya siswa mampu mengubah kegelisahan menjadi sesuatu yang berguna, karena sebenarnya kegelisahan dapat berfungsi sebagai sebuah pengontrol untuk menghindari membuat kesalahan dan juga kekeliruan. Jika siswa berhasil mendapat keuntungan dari kegelisahan, itu artinya kegelisahan memberi pengaruh yang positif. Kesimpulannya, kegelisahan tidak selalu memberi pengaruh buruk, tapi kegelisahan juga berkontribusi memberi sesuatu yang bermanfaat untuk siswa ketika mereka mempelajari sebuah bahasa. Dua sisi kegelisahan tergantung pada bagaimana tindakan siswa terhadap kegelisahan tersebut.

Kata kunci: *kegelisahan menulis dalam bahasa asing, tingkat-tingkat kegelisahan, prestasi siswa*

Introduction

The interest of some studies on the topic of anxiety in recent decades increases rapidly. Previously, they only examined speaking as a skill which cause most anxiety on students, currently there are many researches that examine anxiety on other language skills, for example, writing. Anxiety in writing is a very reasonable for the students when they are ordered to write compositions in a foreign language. Hassan (2001: 4) proposed writing anxiety as a situational-specific anxiety is defined as “a general avoidance of writing and of situations perceived by the individuals to potentially require some amount of writing accompanied by the potential for evaluation of that writing”. Writing anxiety becomes worse in other languages beside the first language because “clearly, second language writing is strategically, rhetorically, and linguistically different in important ways from L1 writing” (Silva, 1993: 670).

Writing anxiety plays a great role in giving negative influence for writing progress as well as writing achievements of students. There is a close relationship between the levels of writing anxiety toward students' performance. Horwitz (2001) finds that language anxiety is negatively related to students' achievement. Even anxiety is able to hide students' performance, because there is significant negative correlation between students who are anxious when writing English composition with their writing achievement (Aida, 1994; Coulombe, 2000 cited in Horwitz, 2001). The certain level of foreign language anxiety is believed to have connection with students' achievement, for instance the higher anxiety results in the lower performance. Horwitz *et al.* (1986) found that “there was a significant moderate negative correlation between FLA and the grades students expected in their first semester language class as well as their actual final grades, indicating that students with higher level of FLA both expected and received lower grades than their less anxious counterparts”.

The writing anxiety as well as the levels of writing anxiety can be detected through Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) that developed by (Cheng, 2004). SLWAI which is in the form of questionnaire contains 22 items of question. The main core of the questionnaires was the participants were asked to “(1) describe the situations under which they felt anxiety when writing in English; (2) specify their physiological and psychological reactions associated with their writing anxiety; (3) specify the effects of writing anxiety on their writing processes and behavior; and (4) explain the reasons for their anxiety feelings.” (Cheng, 2004: 319). The result of the study shows that SLWAI had good internal consistency reliability, respectable test-retest reliability, adequate convergent and satisfactory criterion-related validity with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .91 (Cheng, 2004: 331). Hence, SLWAI is the first valid instrument for measure writing anxiety, especially in second language or foreign language.

This research is going to examine to what extent the levels of anxiety (high, moderate and low) can affect students' achievement. This research firstly aims to find out and describe the relationship between writing achievements and writing anxiety on the students. Secondly, to figure out whether writing anxiety only gives negative influence as previously research found. Thirdly, to show and assist the lecturers in knowing the true conditions of their students in writing classes.

Research Methodology

This research uses mixed method strategy. Through quantitative technique sampling of simple random sampling, 44 students majored English are selected to be the participants of this research. They are asked to fill closed-ended questionnaire of Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (Cheng, 2004). The questionnaire contains 22 items of question. The questionnaire applied a Likert-type 5-choice response format: 1 (strongly agree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly disagree). The maximum score in the Likert scale is 5 and the minimum score is 1. Seven items (1, 4, 7, 17, 18, 21, 22) are negatively worded and reversely scored before being summed up to yield total scores. A total score above 65 points indicates a high level of writing anxiety, a total score below 50 points indicates a low level of writing anxiety, and a total score in-between indicates a moderate level of writing anxiety. After knowing the levels of each students, a semi-structured interview is conducted. By applying purposeful sampling, three students that represent high anxiety, moderate anxiety and low anxiety are selected to be the respondents of the interview. Then after that by the permission of the lecturers in charges of writing 01 and 03, the writer borrows students' writing final scores.

Results

Table 1. provides the summary of the result of SLWAI.

Table 1. The Statistics of the SLWAI

	Number	Minimum	Maximum
Total	44	30	83
High Anxiety	17	65	83
Moderate Anxiety	20	51	64
Low Anxiety	7	30	49

The total number of the respondents are 44 students, 24 students are from semester three and 20 students are from semester one. The participants' scores in this study ranged from 30 to 83. There are 17 students who reported having high writing anxiety level, with the points of 65, 66, 67, 67, 68, 69, 69, 70, 73, 74, 74, 76, 76, 77, 79, 80 and 83. Moderate anxiety is possessed by 20 respondents, the points are 50, 50, 52, 53, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 57, 58, 59, 59, 60, 61, 61, 62, 62, 63 and 64. Lastly, low anxiety which is

experienced by 7 students, who scored the point of 30, 37, 38, 41, 48, 48 and 49.

The statistics in table shows that 39% of the respondents are found to experience high levels of anxiety. The largest percentage is 45% which belongs to moderate anxiety. The lowest is low anxiety with 16%. In case of English Department students of Faculty of Letters, Jember University respondents, moderate anxiety becomes the dominant, which means the average students are in good control of their Foreign Language Writing Anxiety.

Discussion

The first discussion is about a student who had low anxiety level or known as LA. LA had a very good grade in his writing. He always scored good marks in every tasks. In the interview when he is asked what kind of difficulties he encountered when writing compositions using English, he replied with confidence that because he is used with English, so he did not have problem when he is ordered to use English in writing compositions even for essay with specified topic. This proven by his quotation in Indonesian utterances:

“Eh.. klo nulis dalam bahasa Inggris karna sudah terbiasa jadi gak terlalu sulit untuk *brainstrom* itu gak terlalu sulit”.

(“Eh.. Because I’m used to write using English, so it is not too difficult to brainstorm, that is not too difficult”.)

“Eh topik.. asal udah jelas sih gampang buat ngembanginnya”.

(“Eh topic.. As long as it is clear then it is easy to develop it”.)

During the interview to convince his ability, the writer also tested him by giving him a question “If you are instructed to write an essay and you can freely choose the language, between bahasa Indonesia and English, which language would you choose” and without hesitation he chose English. This is like in his quotations:

Interviewee : “Klo saya *personally*, Inggris”
 (“Personally, I choose English”)

Interviewer : “Kenapa kok Inggris?”
 (“Why do you choose English?”)

Interviewee : “Lebih dapet aja *feelnya*”
 (“I get more feel”)

From the interview with LA, then it is proven that the students who have little anxiety level or less writing anxiety positively show themselves as good performers in writing. Ganschow and Sparks (1991, cited in Horwitz, 2001) found that “less anxious learners performed significantly better on oral and written foreign language”. However, despite his anxiety level is low, it does mean that he does not have writing anxiety at all in himself. He is able to manage his anxiety level by always having writing practice and reading a lot to rich his knowledge. The quotation is below:

Interviewer : “Kamu punya cara atau strategi gak untuk mengatasi anxiety kamu itu?”

(“Do you have any ways or strategies to handle your anxiety?”)

Interviewee : “Caranya sering-sering latihan ya klo writing itu.. ya *familiarity*. Jadi juga sering baca juga jadi topik yang kita tahu itu lebih banyak, ya akhirnya pada saat dihadapkan writing itu udah gak ada anxiety....”

(“The way is doing writing practice frequently.. for familiarity. Also often reading, so we know more topics, and at the time we face writing, we do not have anxiety....”)

After observing the entire grades of low anxiety group, there are two students who actually scored almost badly. This result reinforces previous research that students who have little anxiety if it is not in accordance with their academic ability will actually make them lack of awareness and also less control about error or mistake when they are learning language. They tend to disregard their anxiety so that they produce low anxiety and ultimately affect their grades.

The next level is moderate level writing anxiety. MA as the participant of moderate anxiety group scored good marks in his every tasks. It means that a certain amount of anxiety can be beneficial. Chastain (1975, cited in Kao & Craigie, 2010) concluded that “a proper amount of anxiety could facilitate foreign language learning, even though too much anxiety may cause harm”. Writing anxiety can be a facilitator that is beneficial for the success of the students in learning foreign language. For instance, anxiety can be a tool to control the learners in making mistakes. Several previous studies actually have proved that anxiety not always had negative impact to the students, but also it has positive relationship to students’ achievement.

However, when the writer looked at the whole writing scores of the students who have moderate anxiety, there are students who scored narrowly bad although it was only few respondents. MA himself although he always had pretty good marks, but he really felt that writing anxiety in him can affect his achievement. He said that in his utterance:

“Eh..ketika kita merasa anxiety kita kan ya.. atau tidak percaya diri, kadang itu yang ada di otak kita itu mengalirnya juga buntu, nah ketika ide atau informasi gagasan yang kita punya itu tidak bisa kita salurkan atau buntu atau kita mikirnya sering tersendat gitu ya.. itu jadi nanti otomatis kan tulisan kita dampaknya jadi jelek atau speaking kita jadi jelek kayak gitu. Outputnya lah yang nanti dampaknya, jadi kalau kan otomatis mark atau valuenya juga jelek.”

(“Eh.. when we feel anxious.. or not confident, sometime something which exists in our brain cannot drain with a dead-end, when our ideas or information cannot be expressed or it is blocked.. then automatically our writing will become bad or our speaking become not good like that. The impact will be on output, it is automatically bad mark or value”.)

Actually, MA can make better grades, but because of the existence of anxiety on him, then it obstructs him. Zheng (2008) proved what is experienced by MA on his research, he stated that anxiety can lead to a debilitating effect which may lead to inefficient work performance.

The last level is high level of writing anxiety. HA became the respondent of this group had a very high level of writing anxiety. HA without being asked, she openly mentioned her grades in her writing class to the writer when the interview has been completed. She said that her writing marks are not good enough. When the high level of anxiety make the students fail to get or create good grades, it means that anxiety indeed has a negative relationship with students' achievement. High anxiety level truly has a negative role in influencing students' achievement. Awan *et al.* (2010) through their research by applying correlation, they made clear that "as the level of anxiety increase, the academic achievement decrease". Powell (1984, cited in Asmari, 2013) also stated that almost all of highly anxious students received low grades in composition classes. Hereafter, high level of anxiety also affects the students to avoid class conditions. As Oxford (1999, cited in Kao & Craigie, 2010) indicated that anxiety really can broke students' achievement "indirectly through worry and self-doubt and directly by reducing participation and creating overt avoidance of the language". For instance in HA's utterance:

"..... Klo misalkan disuruh maju gitu lebih baik intinya gak usah dulu lah biar temen dulu...."

("..... If we are ordered to come in front of the class, it is better for me to not come, I let my friends first.....")

However, again after the writer viewed the overall grades of students with high level of writing anxiety, surprisingly there are several participants who show that high level of writing anxiety do not always result in poor writing performance as well as grade. High level of anxiety which initially became hypothetical and substantiated in several previous studies that it has a consistent relationship with students' performance or achievement can make the students experience difficulty in receiving foreign language materials and it even hinders the students' progressing in learning foreign language, but that finding is broken by those students who got good grades and some of them scored almost perfect grades. The finding from this study can be considered as reduplication and supports previous research. That anxiety had positive relationship to students' foreign language achievement (Chastain, 1975). Moreover, Horwitz (2001) also made clear statement that "contrary to the predictions of many language teachers, that anxiety is negatively related to students' performance, there were some studies found that learner with high levels of anxiety actually showed higher achievement scores. Those ten students have the same case with Bailey (1983, cited in Kao & Craigie, 2010), she utilizes the existing of anxiety upon herself to motivate her to learn the language harder and harder so that the anxiety which originally was a weakness and a stumbling block when learning foreign language

becomes a tool that assists in the success of learning language.

Conclusion

Based on the three data used (questionnaire, interview transcript and students' writing final scores), the study finds that three levels of anxiety show two sides of effect, negative and positive. The negative effect can be seen by the poor scores of the students' achieved in writing class. The most important matter is that negative effect from writing anxiety possibly occurs to all students even for the learners who posses very low anxiety. It means that writing anxiety for them is considered as a stumbling block and critical problem in learning language. Usually, if the students cannot exploit their anxiety, as their anxiety level rising up, the worse grade they will obtain. Yet, on the other hand anxiety also has positive side to assist the students. In order to be able to alter anxiety into something helpful, the students should take the function of anxiety. Anxiety actually can function as a controller for the learners to avoid producing errors or mistakes while learning a language. When the students perform better and show good achievement by utilizing their anxiety, it means that the anxiety is no longer considered as their problem.

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