NAVIGATING WRITING ANXIETY: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF FINAL-YEAR EFL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

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Abstract
Investigating the writing anxiety of final-year students provides a longitudinal perspective, as these students have accumulated experience in writing activities throughout their studies. They have also developed specific strategies to manage ongoing challenges. Therefore, this study aims to report the changes in final-year students' writing anxiety levels from the start of their studies to their final year. Adopting a qualitative approach, this research involves thirty-three final-year students from a private university in Indonesia. Currently, they are writing their undergraduate theses. This high-stakes task may impact their anxiety, making it crucial to understand how their anxiety evolves over time. Using an open-ended questionnaire, the students described whether their anxiety levels changed from the start of college to their final year. A follow-up interview was then conducted to gather additional data. The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students experienced varying levels of anxiety depending on the type of assignment. Several factors also influenced the reduction of writing anxiety, including adequate writing experience, peer support, technology integration, motivation, and self-awareness.
Keywords: writing anxiety, longitudinal, writing experience

INTRODUCTION

This study aimed at students in the university level are required to complete different types of academic writing including paragraph writing, essay writing, research article and final project. The challenges in every level of study is also increasing. To complete those task, students will likely experience writing difficulties as proven by some studies, such as
such as generating idea, writing mechanics, and grammar usage (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Toba et al., 2019). In addition, Sabti et al. (2019) discussed the problems experience by EFL students, such as low English proficiency compared to L1 learners because they can write quickly and correctly. Moreover, there are also some affective that plays important roles in writing such as personality types, students; background, learning styles, language competence and experience, perception, about writing (Kurniasih et al, 2022).

Emotions significantly influence the learning process, impacting students' language acquisition both positively and negatively. Positive emotions can boost language skills, while negative ones may hinder progress. Dewalee et al. (2019) referred to emotion as the 'heart' of language learning, highlighting its crucial role. EFL learners frequently face anxiety when studying a foreign language. The idea of anxiety was first introduced by Daly and Miller (1975), describing it as negative emotional feelings, especially during tasks like writing in English. Horwitz et al. (1986) further clarified that anxiety involves feelings like

nervousness, tension, worry, and stress. In language classrooms, this anxiety often shows up as fear of negative feedback, comments, or evaluations from others (Hasan, 2021), which can ultimately impair students' writing performance (Horwitz, 2001). He also figure out that that students experiencing low anxiety tend to produce better English compositions compared to those with high anxiety.

Students' writing anxiety is influenced by various factors, including negative feedback from others, insufficient effective feedback, and a lack of writing practice (Cheng, 2002; Jennifer & Ponniah, 2017; Wahyuni, Oktavia, & Marlina, 2019). A further study identified additional sources of anxiety, including low English proficiency and fear of criticism from others (Abdel Latif, 2007). Additional research shows that low self-confidence and limited writing practice also contribute to this anxiety. Other causes include a lack of ideas, limited linguistic ability, time constraints, negative comments from teachers, and inadequate writing activities (Hartono & Maharani, 2020; Sabti et al., 2019).

Several studies have explored anxiety levels among students in different levels of education. Jennifer and Ponniah (2017) discovered that freshmen experienced varying anxiety levels: 44,4% high, 39% moderate, and 16.6% low. Another study comparing writing anxiety between freshmen and sophomores found that most students in both groups faced high anxiety, with mean scores of 73.88 for sophomores and 72.42 for juniors. Interestingly, sophomores exhibited higher anxiety levels than juniors, likely because they still lack sufficient learning experience (Kurniasih et al, 2023).

Research on writing anxiety has been extensively conducted, but there is still scope for longitudinal studies. Examining writing anxiety among final-year students is particularly interesting because they have undergone intensive English learning, especially in writing. These students have practiced writing across various courses, such as Sentence writing, paragraph writing, essay writing, and final project writing. It is hoped that students can learn to manage their anxiety and find solutions to their problems. Therefore, this study aims to explore the writing experiences of final-year students.

METHOD
This study applied a qualitative approach. This study involved thirty-three final-year students in a private university in Malang, Indonesia. They were selected based on the convenience sampling technique. They are also selected because they have filled in Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) in 2022, 2023, and 2025. They have passed some writing courses during their study, such as sentence writing, paragraph writing, essay writing, and an academic writing course. Currently, they are in the process of writing their undergraduate thesis. This high-stakes task is supposed to affect their anxiety, making it crucial to figure out how their anxiety changes over time. This study drew on data from an open-ended questionnaire; the students were asked to describe whether their anxiety level changed from starting college until their final year. Then, a follow-up interview was carried out to get more data. The obtained data was analyzed using thematic analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
To answer the research question, a thematic analysis was performed. After conducting series of data analysis procedures, the students' responses were categorized into some themes as explained below:

Reduction of Writing Anxiety

a. **Reduction of Writing Anxiety due to Writing Experience and Habit**

The level of writing anxiety tends to decrease with an increase in students' experience and writing practices during their studies. Writing academic papers is a requirement for students, which helps them gain more confidence, especially due to their frequent and consistent practice. Additionally, students' understanding of English grammar positively impacts their writing anxiety. This is evident in the student's response: "Yes, because over time I become accustomed to and trained in managing my anxiety."

b. **Reduction of Writing Anxiety due to Social and Environmental Support**

The analysis showed that a supportive social environment is crucial for reducing students' anxiety. In the classroom, both teachers and peers are believed to have a dual effect on students' emotions. Students need academic support from their teachers and peers. Another factor is the increase in social interactions among students, which helps them become open-minded and gain the confidence needed to write. As can be seen in the following excerpt, "I feel my writing anxiety has decreased, perhaps because I have practiced a lot, and my peers always support me."

c. **Reduction of Writing Anxiety due to AI-writing assisting tools**

Technology, especially AI writing assisting tools like ChatGPT, makes a significant contribution to reducing anxiety. Students receive more technical help when experiencing writing blocks. The accessibility of information and learning resources provides opportunities for learners to become autonomous with flexibility. As one respondent explained, "Yes, I feel that my anxiety is getting lower with the help of AI."

d. **Reduction of Writing Anxiety due to Motivation and Self-Awareness**

Technology, especially AI writing assisting tools like ChatGPT, makes a significant contribution to reducing anxiety. Students receive more technical help when experiencing writing blocks. The accessibility of information and learning resources provides opportunities for learners to become autonomous with flexibility. As one respondent explained, "Yes, I feel that my anxiety is getting lower with the help of AI."

Increase in Writing Anxiety due to academic high-stakes tasks

Conversely, some students experience heightened writing anxiety, particularly when facing high-stakes academic tasks like an undergraduate thesis or final project. The pressure to deliver a high-quality paper and fear of errors increase their psychological burden. Perfectionism and the need to meet academic standards can lead to dissatisfaction with their writing. One student explained, "I feel that my anxiety increasing when I do my thesis."

Dynamic changes in Writing Anxiety due to situational factors

Some students reported that their anxiety levels vary depending on the situation. For instance, they feel more anxious when writing about unfamiliar topics. Time pressure can also increase their anxiety. Additionally, their personal feelings and emotions while writing can make the task more difficult. It is in line with one student's response, "My anxiety when writing in English depends on the topic I am assigned".

According to this study, students' writing anxiety is fluctuating; decreasing, increasing, and remaining dynamic. The condition is influenced by various internal and external factors, including motivation and self-awareness, social and environmental support, writing habits and experience, task difficulties, and technological support.

This study pinpointed task difficulties as a key factor that increases anxiety. This matches one of the seven main factors, such as a lack of knowledge about writing, which causes anxiety when they write about unfamiliar subjects. The study also highlighted other issues, including inexperience with the genre, struggles with brainstorming or generating ideas, difficulties in structuring or organizing content, challenges with integrating sources, linguistic difficulties, and receiving either negative or no feedback from instructors (Sun et al., 2024).

The findings are in line with some previous studies. Regarding social and environmental support, Kurniasih et al. (2024) found that Peer review and self-editing are recognized as some of the most effective strategies to alleviate students' writing anxiety. Students had the chance to read their classmates' essays and provide feedback based on the scoring rubric. Shi (2024) conducted a study on Chinese students' learning anxiety during the IELTS writing test, exploring how language proficiency, time constraints, examiner evaluation, and test anxiety interconnect. The findings showed that the first two factors contributed to test anxiety, while examiner scoring had minimal or no effect.

Recent research integrated an AI chatbot named Eva into an online peer review platform to assist students in giving feedback during interventions. The results indicated that this approach significantly improved feedback quality and strengthened students' writing skills (Guo et al, 2024). Similarly, Pratama et al (2024) evaluated the effectiveness of Gencraft and ChatGPT in enhancing students' writing abilities. Their findings support Guo et al (2024), demonstrating that using Gencraft and ChatGPT is effective in developing students' writing skills. Overall, this research underscores the potential of AI technology to advance EFL writing education.

CONCLUSION

It can be said that the students experienced their writing anxiety decreasing mainly because of the writing experience, exercises, and social support. However, some students perceived that their writing anxiety increased when they wrote their undergraduate thesis, and they knew it would be evaluated. In relation to the use of AI for writing, AI has a vital role in helping students write their undergraduate thesis, making it one source/media that can lower the student's anxiety. Another interesting findings provide evidence that writing is dynamic in nature, influenced by situations, topics, and personal conditions. This research offers pedagogical implications in which teachers are expected to create fun classroom and provide freedom for students to select their topic. It is also important to understand the importance

of AI in the writing process. Further research can be done in the are of mixed method research investigating the level of anxiety over time using quantitative approach.

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