



An Investigation of Writing Anxiety among Freshmen University Students in an EFL Context

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the level, dominant type, and reasons for writing anxiety among EFL students through a quantitative research design. The participants were one group of 75 (40 female and 35 male) freshmen students from the Department of English at Karbala University, Iraq. Their ages ranged from 19 to 24, selected through a purposive sampling technique based on their intermediate level of English proficiency. The Language Writing Anxiety Inventory and the Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory (CSLWAI) were administered. Data were analyzed using SPSS software. The findings of this study showed that EFL students have a high level of writing anxiety. Moreover, cognitive anxiety was found to be the predominant type of writing anxiety. The main reason for writing anxiety was fear of teachers' negative comments. This study has significant implications for English language teachers, indicating that they cannot assume their students to be homogeneous in terms of writing anxiety. This suggests that while designing assignments and activities for their programs, teachers should be more aware of the effect of writing anxiety.

KEYWORDS: Anxiety; Cognitive; Writing; Writing Anxiety

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most essential skills. Improving and enhancing writing skills are considered the main factors for succeeding in school, college, and life (Warschauer, 2010). This skill has also been a major obstacle to students' progress in the language for three reasons. First of all, proficient writing is a necessary ability for academic or professional success, but it is particularly challenging for learners of foreign or second languages to acquire. Second, as students are more willing to experiment with complex lexical or syntactic expressions in their written work, writing may be a useful instrument for the development of academic language ability (Warschauer, 2010). Third, writing across the syllabus can be incredibly helpful for mastering a variety of subject matters because it allows learners to become more aware of their knowledge gaps. It also helps teachers better understand students' levels of knowledge and thought processes, which will help them better teach their students (Yih & Nah, 2009). However, it is challenging to acquire accurate and fluent written performance because the learners' attempts to generate output are impacted by a wide variety of cognitive, emotional, and social factors such as attention, communication apprehension, ambiguity tolerance, and anxiety which is the focus of this study.



According to Grupe and Nitschke (2013, p. 489), anxiety is the "anticipated change in emotion, cognition, and behavior in reaction to uncertainty about a potential future threat." In particular, as Hassan (2001, p. 4) underlined, writing anxiety is "a general avoidance of writing and of circumstances regarded by the participants to potentially require a considerable degree of writing coupled by the possibility for examination of that writing". According to Topuzkanamis (2015), writing anxiety is the anxiety someone experiences before a task that requires qualified and competent writing.

The study of writing anxiety has its roots in the learning of first languages. As a result, research on first-language acquisition is crucial to understanding second-language writing anxiety. For writers in first, second, and foreign languages, writing anxiety is widespread (Cheng, 2004; Daly & Miller, 1975a; Daly & Miller, 1975b). When writing causes anxiety for second and foreign language learners, they frequently dread that they won't be able to express themselves effectively and that their readers would see them negatively as a consequence. Similar to general language anxiety, writing anxiety is characterized by excessive concern, self-evaluation, dread of others' opinions, and avoidance of or excessive time spent on the authoring process (Cheng, 2004; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).

ANXIETY IN WRITING

The concept of "writing anxiety" refers to a wide range of unpleasant feelings including stress, concern, anxiousness etc. that may appear when one is faced with a writing assignment. Depending on the circumstances around the writing, a writer may experience these negative emotions to varying degrees. While some people experience anxiety when writing an essay for school, this fear is not there when writing an email on the same subject. Writing a letter to a loved one may cause anxiety in some people. Thus, writing anxiety is a temporal experience that depends on a variety of elements, including the writing task at hand, the surrounding circumstances, one's expectations for both oneself and the audience, and previous writing experiences. Although the terms "writing anxiety" and "writer's block" are sometimes used interchangeably, writing anxiety refers to the many kinds of dread one associates with a writing activity, whereas writer's block is the impact it has on one's process of writing.

In academic context, anxiety while writing is one of the challenges encountered by students. They are negatively impacted by it and acquire unfavorable attitudes toward it as a consequence. It is widely believed that written text production is complicated by nature and demands several cognitive processes. Thus, writing anxiety arises as a consequence of language complexity in general and writing complexity as a skill specifically (Zareie Khatooni, 2022). So, the influence of anxiety as an effective factor in the writing process must not be overlooked. Because there is a connection between anxiety in foreign language classrooms and anxiety in foreign language writing. Students who deal with writing anxiety find every step of the writing process to be very demanding and difficult (Cheng et al., 1999).

Several measures have been developed by researchers focusing on anxiety, even though these measures have mostly concentrated on the anxiety related to speaking in a foreign or second language (Horwitz et al., 1986; Cheng, 2004). The task anxieties associated with listening, reading, and writing in a foreign or second language may not be measured by tests of general language acquisition anxiety in a meaningful or reliable manner. Measures to differentiate between the anxiety brought on by the four language skills have recently been devised (Chen & Lin, 2009; Cheng, 2004; Cheng, 2002; Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999; Daly & Miller, 1975a; Daly & Wilson, 1983; Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007).

Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) was the first commonly used instrument for assessing writing anxiety. English Writing Apprehension Test (EWAT) was later created for English language learners, despite the fact that this survey was primarily intended for native English speakers (Cheng, 2004). In the studies on language learning, WAT is the most frequently used indicator of writing anxiety in second languages (Cheng, 2004), but concerns have been raised regarding the validity of such a measure. WAT was created as a single-dimensional assessment of writing anxiety. This implies that all of the variables on this measure should be found to load on just one factor in factor analysis. In contrast, Cheng (2004) discovered that three factors—low self-confidence, aversion to writing, and



evaluation anxiety—load on the items. Other WAT studies have found items that cover a variety of topics, such as positive feelings about writing, writing self-efficacy, the perceived value of writing, and writing behaviors (Cheng, 2004). These results suggest that the WAT may not be a reliable indicator of writing anxiety since it muddles it with other factors.

To address the issues identified about WAT's validity, the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) was constructed (Cheng, 2004). Three aspects of writing anxiety were intended to be measured by SLWAI: physiological, behavioral, and cognitive (Cheng, 2004). On a five-point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, respondents score each of the 22 statements that make up SLWAI. With the help of three groups of Taiwanese English majors who were studying in an EFL environment, Cheng (2004) developed the SLWAI. The first sample of 67 participants provided answers to an open-ended questionnaire about their writing anxiety. 33 possible survey items were created using the survey results. The first scale was then tested with 56 participants. The 33 items were factor-analyzed, and it was found that 22 of them were loaded on factors that corresponded to the physiological, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of writing anxiety that the SLWAI was intended to evaluate. Items that failed to load on these variables were eliminated. The scores of 421 undergraduate Taiwanese English majors on the 22-item SLWAI were used to check the validity and reliability of the measure (Cheng, 2004). Based on Cheng's (2004) analysis, the SLWAI appeared to be a valid, reliable measure of second language writing anxiety and is used as the measure of writing anxiety for this study.

POTENTIAL REASONS FOR SLWA

As mentioned earlier, writing is a cognitive and emotional activity, meaning that we feel and think when we write. L2 writing is described as a complex system of social, cultural, and contextual factors, as well as individual characteristics of the learner, such as institutional requirements, parental or social anticipations, teaching, and evaluation monitoring and supervision, motivation, personality, self-confidence, learner's belief, L2 competency, and even gender and years in school (Cheng, 2002). As a result, the reasons why foreign language learners feel anxious when writing may vary and be multiple, but some general causes ranging from highly personal (such as self-confidence) to procedural (such as classroom activities and teaching methods) can be identified based on previous research on the area of the second language and writing anxiety.

Writing in a second language is a challenging task because it requires mastering a number of prerequisites and composing abilities. Attempting to master this demanding task might make students anxious, and their inadequacy may make them feel more anxious while writing. Regardless of how long students had previously studied English writing, Sheng (2013) claims that anxiety is "pervasive in EFL writing classrooms no matter how many years students have learned English writing in the past" (p. 9). As a result, there has recently been interest in the field to identify the causes of writing anxiety in foreign language (FL) courses and assess how it affects students' writing performance.

Yet, there is a lack of research on writing anxiety in FL. Those that exist have revealed several features of apprehensive writers in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms. Their English writing anxiety has been attributed to factors such as L1 interference; lack of motivation to write; L2 writing instruction; fear of teachers' feedback; lack of knowledge of the L2 writing process, skills, and vocabulary; inadequate linguistic knowledge of their L2; and psychological factors, such as self-confidence and self-efficacy, tolerance of ambiguity (Cheng, 2004; Rezaeia & Jafari, 2014).

In their consideration of the roles of writing anxiety and evaluation anxiety in second language anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) found that fear of failure was the source of anxiety. Considering that writing in a second language is a productive activity that is heavily impacted by time pressures, the fear of failing examinations is the most significant and prevalent source of writing anxiety. Even the most intelligent and prepared students frequently make more mistakes while taking tests. Although it is similar to test anxiety, fear of negative writing evaluation is more widely spread because it refers to both academic and personal evaluations made by students based on their productivity and competency in the target language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, p.105). It can occur in any social, evaluative situation,



such as when receiving teachers' critical feedback or mistake correction on the compositions, and it can also occur when learners are having feedback on their assignments and projects.

Hassan (2001) identified a few potential reasons for writing anxiety, including poor ability development, insufficient role models, lack of comprehension of the writing process, and authoritative, teacher-centered, product-based education approaches. He emphasized that the key factor in shaping students' emotional responses to writing assignments is their level of self-confidence. No matter how proficient or talented someone is in writing, according to some research, if they fear they will do poorly or if they do not want to enroll in classes that emphasize writing, their talents or skills won't matter much (Hassan, 2001, p. 4). Additionally, research showed that even students with high L2 writing proficiency may not always perceive they are competent writers and may still experience writing anxiety (Cheng, 2002). Therefore, it was determined that students' experiences of L2 writing anxiety were caused by low self-esteem or a lack of confidence in their second language and writing achievement.

Based on the reasons for writing anxiety, Cheng (2004) proposed a classification in which cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance anxiety were the three main types. Cognitive anxiety corresponds to the cognitive element of anxiety experience, which includes negative expectations, performance preoccupation, and concern about how others perceive you. Expectations from other students or teachers may heavily impact how learners write. Somatic anxiety refers to a person's perception of the psychological impacts of anxiety, which include nervousness and tension. When learners are under time constraints and they have run out of ideas, they might get nervous and tense. Avoidance anxiety is a sort of anxiety in which learners avoid writing. This is the behavior dimension of the anxious experience. For instance, learners may fail to attend writing classes or complete their writing assignments. This is the most problematic type of writing anxiety because learners will avoid writing. They will not participate in writing class. Students' writing assignments have yielded no results (Cheng, 2004).

The task anxieties associated with listening, reading, and writing in a foreign or second language may not be measured by tests of general language anxiety in a meaningful or reliable manner. Because of the interest in the subject of writing anxiety and its causes, it was necessary to have a tool for the measurement and classification of the reasons. Linguists and those interested in the field of language took upon themselves the task of research and the creation of a tool for measurement and classification. Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test was the first commonly used instrument for assessing writing anxiety (WAT). English Writing Apprehension Test (EWAT) was later created for use with English language learners, despite the fact that this survey was primarily intended for use with native English speakers (Cheng, 2004). In studies on language learning, WAT is the most frequently used indicator of writing anxiety in second languages (Cheng, 2004), but concerns have been raised regarding the validity of such a measure. WAT was created as a single-dimensional assessment of writing anxiety. This implies that all of the variables on this measure should be found to load on just one factor in factor analysis. In contrast, Cheng (2004) discovered that three factors—low self-confidence, aversion to writing, and evaluation anxiety—load on the items. Other WAT studies have found items that cover a variety of topics, such as positive feelings about writing, writing self-efficacy, the perceived value of writing, and writing behaviors (Cheng, 2004). These results suggest that the WAT may not be a reliable indicator of writing anxiety since it muddles it with other factors.

To address the issues identified about WAT's validity, the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) was constructed (Cheng, 2004). Three aspects of writing anxiety were intended to be measured by SLWAI: physiological, behavioral, and cognitive (Cheng, 2004). On a five-point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, respondents score each of the 22 statements that make up SLWAI. With the help of three groups of Taiwanese English majors who were studying in an EFL environment, Cheng (2004) developed the SLWAI. The first sample of 67 participants provided answers to an open-ended questionnaire about their writing anxiety. 33 possible survey items were created using the survey results. The first scale was then tested on 56 people. The 33 items were factor-analyzed, and it was found that 22 of them were loaded on factors that corresponded to the physiological, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of writing anxiety that the SLWAI was intended to evaluate. Items that failed to load on these variables were eliminated. The scores of 421 undergraduate Taiwanese English majors on the 22-item SLWAI were used to check the validity and reliability of the measure (Cheng, 2004). Based on Cheng's (2004) analysis, the SLWAI appears to be a valid, reliable measure of second language writing anxiety and is used as the measure of writing anxiety for this study.



According to Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 127), considering that writing in a second language is a productive activity that is heavily impacted by time pressures, the fear of failing examinations is the most significant and prevalent source of writing anxiety. Even the most intelligent and prepared students frequently make more mistakes while taking tests. Although it is similar to test anxiety, fear of negative writing evaluation is more widely spread because it refers to both academic and personal evaluations made by students based on their productivity and competency in the target language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, p. 105).

SLWA can have multiple and varied causes, including personal and procedural factors. Based on the results of the previous studies, some of the potential reasons for SLWA are summarized as below:

1. **Mastery of L2 writing prerequisites and composing abilities:** Writing in a second language is a complex and demanding task that requires the mastery of several prerequisites and composing abilities. Attempting to master this task can make learners feel anxious, and their perceived inadequacy may exacerbate their anxiety.
2. **Fear of failure:** Fear of failure is the most significant and widespread source of L2 writing anxiety. Writing in a second language is a productive activity that is heavily impacted by time pressures and the fear of failing examinations is the most prevalent source of writing anxiety.
3. **Lack of L2 writing process, skills, and vocabulary knowledge:** Inadequate knowledge of the L2 writing process, skills, and vocabulary can make learners feel anxious when writing in the second language.
4. **Psychological factors:** Psychological factors such as self-confidence, self-efficacy, and tolerance of ambiguity can significantly impact learners' emotional responses to writing assignments.
5. **Poor ability development:** Poor ability development, insufficient role models, and lack of comprehension of the writing process can contribute to writing anxiety.
6. **Low self-esteem:** Writing anxiety can also be caused by low self-esteem or a lack of confidence in learners' L2 writing achievement.
7. **Language proficiency:** Overall levels and profiles of language proficiency can affect learners' affective responses to L2 learning and writing.
8. **Time, topic, and language:** Time, topic, and language can be significant contributors to poor ESL writing.
9. **Topical knowledge:** Relevant and appropriate subject knowledge can positively impact learners' emotional responses to writing tasks.
10. **Feedback:** The sort of feedback learners receive for their writing can have a direct emotional impact on them. Providing relevant, thorough, and effective feedback with encouraging remarks might improve L2 writing ability and reduce anxiety.

The studies on writing anxiety in different contexts revealed that, to the best knowledge of the researcher, no study has considered writing anxiety among EFL Iraqi freshmen students. Therefore, the present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1- To what extent do Iraqi freshmen students experience writing anxiety?
- 2- What is the dominant type of writing anxiety that Iraqi freshmen students experience?
- 3- What are the main reasons that cause writing anxiety among EFL learners?



METHODOLOGY DESIGN OF THE STUDY

A quantitative study was conducted to investigate the extent to which learners experience writing anxiety together with the dominant type of writing anxiety that learners experience. Moreover, it tried to detect the main reasons that cause writing anxiety among Iraqi EFL learners. The participants were 75 freshmen students from Karbala University in the Department of English Language. 40 of them were female students and 35 were male students. The ages of the participants ranged from 19 to 24. They were all at the intermediate level. Various instruments were employed in this study to facilitate the data collection process. They are as follows:

Quick Oxford Placement Test Version 1 (QOPT): To begin the process of obtaining results, it is required to measure the learners' language proficiency as the first and essential step. The Quick Oxford Placement Test was employed to complete this activity (see appendix A). The QOPT has 60 multiple-choice questions that measure learners' grammatical and vocabulary proficiency. The test ranking is as follows: 1-17 Beginner, 18-27 Elementary, 28-36 Lower – intermediate, 37-47 Upper–intermediate, 48-55 Advanced, and 56-60 Very advanced.

Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory Questionnaire (SLWAI): The participants were examined using a questionnaire, which provided quantitative data on how an individual perceives their levels and types of writing anxiety. The questionnaire on writing anxiety, based on the SLWAI, has 22 items (Cheng, 2004). The original SLWAI was created by Cheng (2004) and measured how anxious a student felt when writing in a second language. The validity and reliability of the SLWAI have been determined using correlation and factor analysis (Cheng, 2004), and it has been used in several studies related to second language writing anxiety. Cheng's (2003) writing anxiety questionnaire is a reliable instrument with a Cronbach's Alpha reliability score of 0.89. In order to ensure that the questionnaire is suitable for the target sample, the reliability of the instrument was piloted with a sample of 15 students, which turned out to be 0.86. Three Ph.D. holders in Applied Linguistics checked the instrument's validity. The SLWAI is divided into two sections. The first section contains demographic information about the participants, such as sexual identity, age, and name. The second section consists of 22 items, scored on a five-point Likert response scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree (See Appendix A).

Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory (CSLWAI): The Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory was adapted from Rezaei and Jafari (2014) as a framework for analyzing the causes of writing anxiety. It is divided into two components. The first part consists of demographic information and the second part consists of ten questions. The Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory (CSLWAI) is a ten-item questionnaire each of which is assessed on a five-point Likert scale (See Appendix B).

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

After getting consent from the administrators in charge of the language department at the university of Karbala where the study was conducted, a Quick Oxford Placement Test (QOPT) was employed as a standardized test to ensure the homogeneity of participants in aspects of their English ability. Students took the exam under the supervision and guidance of the researcher directly. Those with an intermediate level were selected to resume the rest of the procedures. According to the participants' performances, two classes of EFL freshmen learners were selected to participate in this study. The selected participants were provided with The Writing Anxiety Inventory Questionnaire (SWAI) and the Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory (CSLWAI) in the second phase of the study. They were asked to fill out the questionnaire. The researcher had read the questionnaire in class and ensured that there was no ambiguity regarding the content of the items. The researcher instructed the participants on how to fill out the questionnaire, then the questionnaires were returned by the participants once they had answered all of the questions.



DATA ANALYSIS

The results of this study are quantitative in nature. The data were interpreted, displayed, and analyzed to further understand the study's findings. The analysis was done by SPSS Software statistics version 26. The interpretation and analysis were based on the scores of the three questionnaires given to the students. As for the first research question the researcher classified the levels of writing anxiety into three main categories. They are categorized as high, moderate, and low levels.

As for the second research question, the researcher classified the types of writing anxiety into three main categories which are Cognitive Anxiety, Somatic Anxiety, and Behavior Anxiety, the types of writing anxiety were investigated using *descriptive statistics* to reach the mean of each category based on the SLWAI questionnaire.

For the third research question, the descriptive statistic was applied to find the What are the main reasons that cause writing anxiety among EFL learners, to determine the main causes of writing anxiety, the responses of students to the Causes of Writing Anxiety Scale (CWAI) questionnaire are interpreted by multiplying each counting score by the corresponding questionnaire point. The questionnaire has ten questions and uses a five-point Likert response scale, where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 5 represents "strongly agree". After multiplying each counting score by the questionnaire point, the total score is obtained and converted into a percentage. The highest percentage obtained is identified as the main cause of writing anxiety. The percentage was calculated by employing the following formula: The percentage = Total score for each item /Total score of all items x 100%. Furthermore, the researcher used SPSS software to determine the mean of each question.

RESULTS

To find the extent to which Iraqi freshmen students experience writing anxiety, the researcher applied the second language writing anxiety inventory (SLWAI) to explore the general direction of anxiety and the total mean. A total mark above 65 indicates a high level of writing anxiety, a total mark below 50 indicates a low level of writing anxiety, and a total mark in-between the first two numbers indicates a moderate level of writing anxiety. The results of the SLWAI questionnaire are in view in Table 1 showing the levels and the percentage of writing anxiety and table 2 which shows the total mean and direction of the participants' answers.

Table 1

Levels of writing anxiety based on SLWAI inventory

| | Number of the students | Minimum score | Maximum score | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| High Anxiety | 68 | 66 | 100 | 90.666% |
| Moderate Anxiety | 5 | 63 | 65 | 6.666% |
| Low Anxiety | 2 | 45 | 45 | 2.666% |
| Total | 75 | 45 | 100 | 100% |

The researcher classified the levels of writing anxiety into three main categories after analyzing the SLWAI questionnaire. They are categorized as high, moderate, and low levels. According to Table 1, 90.6% of participants have a high level of writing anxiety, participants with a moderate level of writing anxiety represent 6.6%, while participants with a low level of writing anxiety account for 2.6%. According to the statistical results, high levels of



anxiety have taken over as the dominant level. Therefore, the researcher concludes that the majority of participants have a high level of writing anxiety.

Table 2

Levels of writing anxiety based on the total mean of SLWAI inventory

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Sum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------|----|---------|---------|--------|--------|----------------|
| TOTAL | 75 | 2.05 | 4.55 | 261.45 | 3.4860 | .45979 |

According to the explanation of the five-point Likert scale, the mean is divided into five categories. From 1.00 to 1.80, it means strongly disagree, from 1.81 to 2.60 disagree, from 2.61 to 3.40 uncertain, from 3.41 to 4.20 =agree, and from 4.21 to 5.00 strongly agree. As can be seen, the mean of the first question is 4.0100 meaning that most of the students chose "agree" and for the last question, the mean was 3.4000 which indicates that students chose "uncertain". The results show that the total mean of all the questions of the second language writing anxiety inventory (SLWAI) is 3.5900, with st. deviation 1.13 according to the explanation of the five-point Likert scale. This means the general direction is "agree" which indicates most of the participants suffer from a high level of writing anxiety. The types of writing anxiety were investigated using the mean of each category based on the SLWAI questionnaire.

Table 3

Type of writing anxiety based on the SLWA questionnaire

| Type of Anxiety | N | Minimum | Maximum | Sum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------------|----|---------|---------|--------|--------|----------------|
| Cognitive Anxiety | 75 | 2.38 | 4.50 | 271.13 | 3.6150 | .50074 |
| Somatic Anxiety | 75 | 1.43 | 4.57 | 255.86 | 3.4114 | .62681 |
| Behavior | 75 | 1.71 | 4.86 | 255.86 | 3.4114 | .64487 |
| Valid N | 75 | 1.43 | 4.86 | | | |

Based on the table above, the mean of cognitive anxiety is 3.6150, somatic anxiety is 3.4114, and avoidance behavior is 3.4114. It means that cognitive anxiety is the highest mean, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior have the same mean but different std. deviations. The standard deviation of somatic anxiety is higher than the avoidance behavior. It means that somatic anxiety is the second type, and avoidance behavior becomes the lowest mean. Cognitive anxiety is the highest mean among the two types of writing anxiety. It means that cognitive anxiety is the dominant type of writing anxiety.

The causes of Writing Anxiety Scale (CWAI) questionnaire was interpreted to determine the main causes of writing anxiety. The first step in interpreting the students' responses is to multiply each counting score by each questionnaire point. The CWAI questionnaire, which contains ten questions, is scored on a five-point Likert response scale, with points 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, and 5= strongly agree. The total score was summed up after multiplying the result by the Likert point to calculate the percentage. The highest percentage would be identified as the main cause of writing anxiety. The percentage was calculated by employing the following formula: The percentage = Total score for each item /Total score of all items x 100%. Furthermore, SPSS software was employed to determine the mean for each question. Forming conclusions based on the data analysis



findings by analyzing the questionnaire, the researcher determines the causes of writing anxiety among the participants. Table 4 provides the findings.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Causes of Writing Anxiety

| Statements | SA | A | U | D | SD | Total score | Mean | St. Deviation | Percent (%) |
|-------------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|--------------------|-------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | 25 | 33 | 10 | 5 | 2 | 291 | 3.99 | 0.99 | 10.740% |
| 2 | 21 | 30 | 10 | 10 | 4 | 279 | 3.72 | 1.16 | 10.306% |
| 3 | 14 | 27 | 25 | 7 | 2 | 271 | 3.59 | 0.98 | 10.011% |
| 4 | 20 | 28 | 15 | 10 | 2 | 279 | 3.72 | 1.08 | 10.306% |
| 5 | 14 | 24 | 18 | 15 | 4 | 254 | 3.39 | 1.15 | 9.383% |
| 6 | 22 | 24 | 13 | 12 | 4 | 273 | 3.64 | 1.21 | 10.084% |
| 7 | 14 | 26 | 20 | 9 | 6 | 258 | 3.44 | 1.16 | 9.530% |
| 8 | 23 | 22 | 18 | 9 | 3 | 287 | 3.71 | 1.14 | 10.602% |
| 9 | 15 | 25 | 22 | 9 | 4 | 263 | 3.51 | 1.1 | 9.715% |
| 10 | 15 | 25 | 15 | 12 | 8 | 252 | 3.36 | 1.26 | 9.309% |

The main causal factor of writing anxiety among the participants is fear of the teacher's negative comments (10.740%) which is stated as the first statement in the questionnaire. It is the highest percentage among the other causes of writing anxiety.

Below are the causes arrangement of writing anxiety, ordered by their percentages:

1. I worry about the negative comments and evaluations of the teacher.
2. I feel anxious due to the high frequency of writing assignments.
3. I don't have a good command of English writing techniques which makes me feel anxious.
4. I'm afraid of writing tests.
5. I often encounter some linguistic problems such as inadequate mastery of vocabulary, sentence structures, grammatical errors, etc.
6. I have lack of sufficient English writing practice which makes me feel anxious.
7. I feel worry when I have to write under time constraints.
8. I'm under pressure to offer a perfect work which makes me upset
9. I don't know what to write on the topic given by the teacher so I feel upset.
10. I have a low-confidence in English writing.



DISCUSSION

The findings of data analysis indicate that EFL Iraqi English language learners experience a high level of writing anxiety. Based on the findings, 68 students (90.666%) reported high levels of writing anxiety, 5 students (6.666%) reported moderate levels of writing anxiety, and 2 students (2.666%) reported low levels of writing anxiety.

According to the analysis of the categories of writing anxiety, cognitive anxiety is the most common type of writing anxiety experienced by students. These results are in line with Wahyuni and Umam's study (2017). They reported that there are certain conclusions that can be drawn based on the statistics presented in the study findings. The majority of students experience high levels of writing anxiety, twenty-seven 56 students (54%) have high levels, twenty-two students (44%) have moderate levels, and only one student (2%) has a low level of writing anxiety. The findings of this research are comparable with Rezaei and Jafaris' study (2014), which found that the majority of students reported high levels of writing anxiety. Iranian EFL students' writing anxiety was the subject of a study by Rezaei and Jafari. They discovered through a mixed-methods study that Iranian EFL students have a high level of anxiety

The findings also indicated that there is a dominant type of writing anxiety that learners experience more than others. The findings are in line with the results of Rezaei and Jafaris' study, in terms of the predominant type of writing anxiety (2014). They concluded that the most prevalent type of writing anxiety was cognitive in nature. The term "cognitive anxiety" describes the cognitive component of anxiety experiences, such as negative expectations, preoccupation with achievement, and concern about how others will see them. Expectations from teachers or other students may have a big impact on how students perform. For instance, the students should fulfill the instructor's high standards since the teacher has high expectations for them. Due to their increased attention to other people's expectations rather than their own work, it may have an influence on the students' writing.

Moreover, Tuppong's study (2014) examined students' writing anxiety at Satya Christian University's English Teacher Education. He discovered that the highest prevalent type of writing anxiety was cognitive anxiety. When students are concerned about others' perceptions or other expectations, they experience cognitive anxiety. Students are unconcerned about their expectations. They are concerned and anxious because they know their composition will be evaluated and debated in front of the class. Students are worried that their classmates will judge their English compositions once they read them, and they are particularly concerned that their English compositions will be graded poorly. As a result, students who are suffering from cognitive anxiety must fight various external unfavorable forces; next, they must be capable of controlling their minds in order to reduce their anxiety levels.

The obtained data were analyzed and the results revealed that the main causes of writing anxiety are fear of the teacher's negative comments (10.740%), high frequency of writing assignments (10.602%), insufficient writing technique (10.306%), and fear of writing tests (10.306%). Fear of the teacher's negative comments is the first main cause of writhing anxiety. The majority of students experience anxiety when their writing is evaluated. They are anxious when their writing is not as good as their teachers had hoped, and as a result, their teacher gives them poor evaluations. Most students are more concerned with their teachers' evaluations than with their writing. It causes them to feel uncomfortable when writing, and as a result, they experience writing anxiety. Therefore, the teacher/lecturer should give more positive feedback and frequently encourage students to enhance their writing. With this result, we stated that the main cause of writing anxiety is the fear of teachers' negative comments

This research has important implications for English language instructors, indicating that they can't consider their students to be homogeneous in terms of writing anxiety. According to these indicators, teachers should be more aware of this variable while designing the assignments and activities for their courses.



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APPENDIX A

Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) (Cheng, 2004)

Demographic information:

Name:

Gender:

Academic Year:

Date:

Instruction:

Read the following statement and express your degree of agreement / disagreement by ticking. Check the appropriate column. Note that SA: Strongly Agree A: Agree U: Uncertain D: Disagree SD: Strongly Disagree.

| Statements | SA | A | U | D | SD |
|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. While writing in English, I'm not nervous at all. | | | | | |
| 2. I feel my heart pounding when I write English compositions under time constraint. | | | | | |
| 3. While writing English compositions, I feel worried and uneasy if I know they will be evaluated. | | | | | |
| 4. I often choose to write down my thoughts in English. | | | | | |
| 5. I usually do my best to avoid writing English compositions. | | | | | |
| 6. My mind often goes blank when I start to work on an English composition. | | | | | |
| 7. I don't worry that my English compositions are a lot worse than others'. | | | | | |
| 8. I tremble or perspire when I write English compositions under time pressure. | | | | | |
| 9. If my English composition is to be evaluated, I would worry about getting a very poor grade. | | | | | |



| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| 10. I do my best to avoid situations in which I have to write in English. | | | | | |
| 11. My thoughts become jumbled when I write English compositions under time constraint. | | | | | |
| 12. Unless I have no choice, I would not use English to write composition. | | | | | |
| 13. I often feel panic when I write English compositions under time constraint. | | | | | |
| 14. I'm afraid that other students would deride my English composition if they read it. | | | | | |
| 15. I freeze up when unexpectedly asked to write English compositions. | | | | | |
| 16. I would do my best to excuse myself if asked to write English compositions. | | | | | |
| 17. I don't worry at all about what other people would think of my English compositions. | | | | | |
| 18. I usually seek every possible chance to write English compositions outside of class. | | | | | |
| 19. I usually feel my whole-body rigid and tense when I write English compositions. | | | | | |
| 20. I'm afraid of my English composition being chosen as a sample to be discussed in class. | | | | | |
| 21. I'm not afraid at all that my English compositions would be rated as very poor. | | | | | |
| 22. Whenever possible, I would use English to write compositions. | | | | | |

APPENDIX B

Causes of Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (CSLWAI)

Demographic information:

Name:

Gender:

Academic Year:

Date:

Instruction:

Read the following statement and express your degree of agreement/disagreement by ticking. Check the appropriate column. Note that SA: Strongly, Agree, A: Agree, U: Uncertain, D: Disagree, and SD: Strongly Disagree.



| Statements | SA | A | U | D | SD |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| <p>When I write English essays:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I worry about the negative comments and evaluation of the teacher. 2. I'm afraid of writing tests. 3. I have lack of sufficient English writing practice which makes me feel anxious. 4. I don't have a good command of English writing techniques which makes me feel anxious. 5. I don't know what to write on the topic given by the teacher so I feel upset. 6. I often encounter some linguistic problems such as inadequate mastery of vocabulary, sentence structures, grammatical errors, etc. 7. I'm under pressure to offer a perfect work which makes me upset. 8. I feel anxious due to the high frequency of writing assignments. 9. I feel worry when I have to write under time constraints. 10. I have a low-confidence in English writing. | | | | | |