Writing Anxiety in Relation to High Performing Students' English Compositions

Kurniasih

kurniasih_suherman@yahoo.com

University of Islam Malang

ABSTRACT

This study attempts to investigate the correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance. Writing is a productive skill in which English learners are required to master it well because they will have to write many English compositions during their study. Out of fifty students who registered in Writing II course only nineteen students participated in this study because their writing score is ≥ 80. The data was analyzed by using SPPS version 17.0 to find the correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance. The results of this study show r is -587 and significant at the level 0.05. It means that there was significant correlation between students' writing anxiety and writing performance; therefore the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Furthermore, it reveals that writing anxiety was negatively correlated with students' writing performance. In other words, when students felt anxious, they tend to produce poor compositions. In contrast, when their anxiety is low, they will likely to produce good piece of writing.

Keywords: writing anxiety, writing performance, high proficient students

INTRODUCTION

It is widely acceptable that writing in a target language is a demanding task to do even for English students. Before they start writing, it is undeniable that they should have sufficient knowledge in order to produce good piece of writing. They have to master the linguistics aspects, such as the selecting appropriate diction and using correct grammar. Moreover, it is essential to be able to use correct punctuation, spelling, mechanic, and capitalization. One more important point is the ability to generate ideas in order to write interesting and worth reading compositions. In short, it can be concluded that writing is a complete package of knowledge. It is totally different from speaking skill in which sometime making errors are considered normal as long as the interlocutors understand the message.

Completing compositions with no anxiety is such a great achievement to be proud of. Most students tend to experience writing anxiety which normally can affect their performance. As a result, they won't be able to write well. In addition, they feel more anxious when they know that their work is going to be scored. However, they feel less anxious when they write just for exercises or free writing. It is proved by the research findings of a study conducted by Negari and Rezaabadi (2012). Furthermore, students' anxiety increased when they have to do the writing test under time constraint. Consequently, anxiety brings negative effect psychologically which results in deterioration in writing performance. Awan, Azher, Anwar and Nas (2015) has investigated the correlation between foreign language classroom

anxiety and student' achievement, to highlight their findings, they stated that "as the level of anxiety increases, the academic achievement decreases".

On the other hand, Brown (2007) argued that a little stress when doing a task is beneficial because it makes people concentrate or focus on the task. Then, it can avoid them from being carefree; moreover on writing students have to put high attention on accuracy (grammatical item), and writing can be developed through lots of practices. Horwitz (2001) has made contrary statement to what most teachers assume that students who experience high anxiety have low achievement. In fact, students with high level anxiety can perform well in writing. In short, writing anxiety can also be used as a controller to avoid of making mistakes.

Commonly, the students in the tertiary level are heterogeneous group. They attend different classes for different subjects, and they are situated in a mix-ability class. The researcher assumes that high performing students experience low anxiety when they write English compositions both in a 'low anxiety environment' and in a 'writing test environment', whereas low performing students is predicted to have high anxiety in both conditions. This study only focuses on investigating high performing students. Thus, the present research reveals to answer for the following questions: (1). what are the types, level, and cause of writing anxiety of high performing students? (2). is there any significance correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance?

The following are the research hypothesis: H1: there is correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance. Ho: There is no correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Writing anxiety

Conveying massages through written form is challenging for most EFL learners. As they realize that English is not their native language, they need much effort to deliver their massage across the readers. It is common that students will have to do their writing exam in the class within the time limit. This condition leads to negative performance, therefore it creates high anxiety.

Writing anxiety is categorized into three types; they are Somatic Anxiety, Cognitive Anxiety, and Avoidance Behavior. Cognitive anxiety is related to mental, for instance perception of others, has close relation with mental changes, which happens inside of the body, for example feeling worry, fear, and nervous. In contrast, Cheng (2004, p. 316) associated Somatic Anxiety with some symptoms which can be

observed. The body makes significant signs like trembling, sweaty, and guilty. Avoidance Behavior is related to refusal if students are asked to write composition in English. They preferred to write their ideas in their first language (Cheng, 2004, p. 317).

A number of considerable studies have been conducted under similar topics. Ayu, Wisasongko, and Kusumaningputri (2015) have done a study to three students with low, moderate, and high anxiety. The total participants were 44 students, and the three students were the representatives of all levels of anxiety. The results of the study showed that writing anxiety can have both negative and positive effect for the students. The negative effects can be minimized by turning them into motivation to learn English. So, it is no longer a problem for them.

The second study was carried out by Kurniasih (2013). The subjects of the study were 44 third students of English Department, University of Islam Malang. The study revealed that students experience high anxiety when they did writing exam under time constraint. From the SLWAI analysis, it is found that the mean score of writing anxiety is 65.86 which is categorized as high level of anxiety. Out of the three types of writing anxiety, most students experienced cognitive anxiety by the mean score (23.9). Furthermore, there are some factors that cause student's anxiety such as linguistics difficulties, lack of topic knowledge, insufficient writing technique, and insufficient writing practice.

Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert (1999) conducted a study to 433 English students who registered in speaking and writing course. They study in four different universities in Taiwan. In this study, they made us of an adapted SLAWT, a modified FLCA, and a background questionnaire to measure student's anxiety. Then, it was translated into Chinese to avoid misunderstanding. Furthermore, the student's final grades were obtained from their test. It was used to measure the students' achievement. They found that writing anxiety has negative correlation with students' writing performance (course grade) and their motivation to write or to take advance writing course.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used correlation design. Through simple random sampling, 52 participants first year students were asked to fill out a Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) questionnaire by Cheng (2004). The SLWAI was used to measure the types and the level of writing anxiety. The questionnaire itself consists of three types of writing anxiety (Cognitive anxiety, Somatic Anxiety, and Avoidance Behavior) and used Likert-type 5-choice response format. It consists of 22 items under the following distribution: Cognitive Anxiety (1, 3, 7, 9, 14, 17, 20, 21), Somatic Anxiety (2, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15,

19), and Avoidance Behavior (4, 5, 10, 12, 16, 18, 22). Some statements (1, 4, 17, 18, 22) are in written in a negative statement; therefore the writer did reverse scoring. Furthermore, total score above 65 indicates high and below 50 indicates low anxiety level.

Then, the researcher categorized students' into high and low performing students based on the average of two assignment scores. The criteria was student who score 0-69 were categorized as low, 70-79 (moderate), and 80-100 (high) . The criteria were adopted from scoring guideline in Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Islam Malang. Finally, it was found that only 19 students who had high writing achievement.

The next instrument was the writing test. The data from writing test was used to find the correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance in a timed test with the given topic sentence. There were nine different topic sentences, and they had to choose one topic sentence based on the last number of the students identity number (NPM). This was done to minimize the possibility of choosing the same topic sentence if it is based on their preference.

To figure out the students' level and types of writing anxiety, the data from SLWAI questionnaire was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The qualitative data is used to know the level of high students' anxiety and its type. The quantitative method is used to know the correlation between anxiety and writing performance. The followings are the research procedures to analyze the text:

a. To figure out the students' level and types of writing anxiety, the data from SLWAI questionnaire was analyzed and interpreted in the form of a diagram. To find the correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance,

$$\overline{\mathrm{x}} = \frac{\sum x}{n}$$

b. To know the correlation between students' writing anxiety and writing performance, the researcher made used of person product moment using SPSS version 17.0

c. To determine the strength of the relationship, the researcher made used of Cohen (1988, as cited in Pallant, 2000) guidelines:

r = .10 to .29 or r = -.10 to -.29   small

r = .30 to .49 or r = -.30 to -.49   medium

r = .50 to 1.0 or r = -.50 to -1.0   large

FINDINGS

Types of writing anxiety

Table 1 below summarizes the type of writing anxiety:

Table 1

Cognitive	23.95
Somatic	20
Avoidance	19.3

The table above shows that cognitive was the most chosen type of anxiety. The second was somatic anxiety, and the least chosen was avoidance behavior.

Level of Writing Anxiety

The result data analysis shows that the high performing students experienced high level of anxiety when they have to write compositions. It is proved by the calculation below to find the mean score of student's anxiety level:

$$\overline{x} = \frac{1.268}{19}$$

$$= 67.73$$

Referring to the criteria to determine the level of anxiety in which The mean score above 65 points level of writing anxiety, the mean below 50 points indicate a low level of writing anxiety, and the mean score in-between 50-65 indicated a moderate level of writing anxiety. The findings show that high students experienced high level of anxiety.

Cause of writing Anxiety

The interesting fact begins to emerge here, the researcher take the top five most chosen causes of writing anxiety. See the following table:

Table 2

Item No.	Causes
9	If my English composition is to be evaluated, I would worry about getting a very poor grade.
11	I often feel panic 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.
8	I tremble or perspire when I write English compositions under time pressure.
2	I feel my heart pounding when I write English compositions under time constraint.

From the table above, it can be concluded that high proficient students worried of getting poor grade, and they were anxious when they have to write compositions under time constraint.

Correlation between Writing Anxiety and Writing Performance

Table 3: Correlations

		WRITING ANXIETY	WRITING ACHIEVEMENT
WITING ANXIETY	Pearson Correlation	1	-.587[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.008
	N	19	19
WRITING ACHIEVEMENT	Pearson Correlation	-.587[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	
	N	19	19

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Table 3 was result of SPSS analysis indicated that there was strong, negative correlation between the two variables [r=-587, p<0.05] with high anxiety level associated with low writing performance. The negative sign means there is negative correction between two variables; it goes to different direction.

DISCUSSION

This study revealed different findings as Daud, Daud, amd Kassim (2003) that students experienced anxiety because they lack of writing skill. In this study, even high performing students experienced high

anxiety not because they lack of writing skill. Among the three types of writing anxiety, it is interesting that high proficient students mostly experienced cognitive anxiety when they wrote English compositions. Basically, cognitive anxiety refers to one main point which is afraid of getting poor grade. What made them more nervous was that their written work was going to be evaluated, and they were worry of getting poor grade. It is undeniable that high proficient students always want to be the best in the classroom, and they want to get the highest score for any task and assignments.

High proficient students felt anxious when they wrote compositions because of several reasons mentioned above, anxiety doesn't always give negative effect for students. In fact, it can raise students' awareness of the importance to use correct grammar, write great ideas, and write coherence and unity essay. It is in line with Brown (2007) and Howitz (2001) statement's that little anxiety is beneficial for students to be more careful. It is clear that high anxiety students experience anxiety because they worried of getting poor grade; therefore they tried to do their best when they wrote compositions.

The second highest anxiety was somatic anxiety. They still feel anxious when they have to write short essay in the class with the given topic. Normally, students were given 90 minutes to complete their work. What made them more anxious was the limited time, within 90 minutes students should be able to generate ideas for their essay, turned those ideas into an essay. It is different from take home writing exam in which students had enough time to so writing stages for submitting their final essay.

The following types of anxiety is avoidance behavior, it is related to students' effort to write in English in any situations or their effort to avoid writing in English. English students are required to write their compositions and essays in English. They have passed Writing I & II, so they have been familiar with writing English. High students have better English ability than lower students; therefore they don't hesitate to write any ideas, stories, messages, and other written activities in English. The problem only lies on the time constraint which causes students level of anxiety high.

The researcher then analyzed the cause of writing anxiety take from a SLWAI questionnaire. The findings revealed that that item no. 11, 8, 2 are identical. They refer to the same point in which even high achievers fell more anxious when they have to do a timed-writing test. Furthermore, item no 9 and 3 also reveal the same idea that students feel worry of getting poor grade. It is unsurprising that high students put high concern on getting good grade. It clearly proves that good score really matters to them.

The result of SPPS version 17.0, the results show that there is significant correlation between students anxiety and students writing performance at the level 0.05, and the correlation coefficient (r) is -587. It means that when the writing anxiety is high, students' writing performance is low. When students'

anxiety is low, students writing performance is high. It is undeniable that when students' felt nervous, panic, anxious and worried, they couldn't control their emotion; therefore they tended to produce poor writing. In contrast, when they are very calm, relax, and confident, they will likely to find it easy to express ideas in written form, so they can produce good piece of writing. It indicated strong correlation. Furthermore, it proved that the alternative hypothesis is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected.

CONCLUSION

High proficient students felt anxious when they wrote composition under time constraint, and they worried of getting poor grade. Furthermore, they experience high anxiety if they now they compositions are being evaluated. Because they have good ability in English, they always want to perform well in assignments. The research subjects are only few students, 19 students, therefore, It is suggested for further researcher to conduct similar study using more subject, so the result of this later study can be generalized to the population.

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