

Writing Anxiety as a Predictor of Writing Self-Efficacy in English for Special Education Arab Learners

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Abstract

The study aimed at investigating the relationship between writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy in English for special education Arab learners of English. It also investigated the use of writing anxiety scores as a predictor of writing self-efficacy. In addition, it explored differences between males and females in both writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy in English. The sample of the study consisted of 90 intermediate school students in the state of Kuwait (47 males and 43 females); the mean age was 8.67 years and the standard deviation was 2.4 years. The descriptive research design was adopted in the study. The researchers used writing anxiety scale, writing self-efficacy scale and an achievement test in English writing skills. Results of the study showed that there is a positive relationship between students' writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy for male students and the overall sample while no relationship was detected among these variables for female students. In addition, results revealed that writing anxiety scores could be used as a predictor of students' writing self-efficacy in English for male students and the overall sample of the study whereas writing anxiety scores could not be used as a predictor of writing self-efficacy for female students. It was found that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female students in their scores of writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy in English Language.

Keywords: writing anxiety, self-efficacy, Arab learners

1. Introduction

1.1 *Introducing the Problem*

Writing skill is one of the most crucial of the four English language skills. It is the productive skill that almost all people use to fulfill their goals in their daily activities. The significance of writing among these four skills stems from the fact that people escape from speaking in front of others. Therefore, there is no other outlet except the writing skill. Unfortunately, writing anxiety makes students unable to write which exaggerate their problem. Thus, deciding on the reasons of writing anxiety and how to develop writing self-efficacy will undoubtedly help learners to write effectively.

1.2 *Literature Review and Related Scholarship*

Writing is one of the four basic language skills that is given an utmost degree of importance. Majority of research were conducted to investigate certain aspects of the writing skills. Therefore, it has become so clear that writing is important whether for academic or occupational purposes. Writing helps people to express their ideas, emotions and feelings. Writing also helps them to promote the sense of ownership. Therefore, writing is considered to be the commonest way of assessing students' performance in English especially in the Arab countries (Salem, 2013, p. 1).

Writing is so important as to be included in foreign language syllabus for many reasons; one of these reasons is that people need writing to communicate with each other. Also, writing helps students learn effectively. According to Salem (2008), writing ameliorates students' grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary. In addition, writing helps students to be adventurous in using the language. It provides students a challenging opportunity to go deep beyond what they have directly learned to say. It is worth noting that writing helps students to become deeply involved with the new language.

Al-Saleem (2008, p. 77) views that writing is one of the most important elements of the activities that take place within the classroom. It is of great aid for students to practice grammatical structures and vocabulary. Writing in his point of view-represents an excellent means for expressing their ideas and thoughts without being obliged to be in a face-to-face interaction. The same idea was adopted by Helal (2003, p. 18) who states that variety of instruction, developed instruction and developed literacy skills can be ensured through providing challenging writing activities.

Developing English writing skills depends mainly of designing instructions that address students' needs and objectives. Writing represents one of the main devices for people to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings. Moreover, it helps people to shape their ideas, to persuade and convince others (Gracey, 2004, p. 53). The written form of a language remains forever, unless it is destroyed by people or by the effect of time. Writing is of great importance for learning to happen, without writing, language learning remains incomplete (Elizabeth, 2004, p. 295).

In spite of its ultimate importance, writing skills may be impeded from being enhanced and developed because of writing anxiety. Foreign language anxiety is a construct that can be touched in all classes. However, the literature provides limited empirical evidence to indicate whether foreign language students and teachers are aware of it (Trang, Baldauf, & Moni, 2013).

Writing anxiety may derive from experiencing failure in the past or it may be ordinary fear of failure. Therefore, Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 127), refer to "a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure". The fear of failing a test pervades every school environment and is the prevailing cause of writing apprehension in L2 writing situations.

Many studies in the area of English writing instruction have highlighted that writing anxiety is an important factor that affects the quality as well as perception of writing amongst students. Therefore, due to all the challenges students face in writing, many L2 students may feel strained or discouraged and this will eventually cause them to stop even trying to write due to this anxiety. Thus, students who suffer high levels of anxiety may suffer in their learning of the language (Al Sawalha & Foo, 2013).

Writing anxiety relates with the relation between writing and reading skills. The more students read, the more they are able to write easily without being afraid of the writing tasks. Lee and Krashen (1997) conducted a study to investigate writing apprehension in Chinese as a first Language. First year high school students in Taiwan filled out a questionnaire probing their writing anxiety and leisure reading and writing habits in Chinese. A strong relationship was found between reported writing apprehension and frequency of leisure writing. In addition, there was evidence of a relationship between writing apprehension and frequency of reading, suggesting that those who read have lower writing apprehension. According to Lee and Krashen (1997), writing skills are strongly tied to the reading skills. It is a well-known fact that good writers have two kinds of competence. First, they know the code, the language of writing. There is strong evidence that this code is acquired from reading. Therefore, students who read more are better writers. Therefore, there are two main reasons of writing anxiety: (1) Insufficient acquisition of the code, and (2) misunderstanding of the composing process, the false belief that good writers get it right on the first draft.

Al Sawalha and Foo (2013) investigated the cause of writing apprehension of Jordanian EFL students at Yarmouk University in Jordan. The sampling of this study consisted of 24 third year students studying B.A English Language at Yarmouk University in Jordan for the academic year 2010/2011. The instruments used in this study were focus group interview. The results of this study showed that majority of the Jordanian EFL students at Yarmouk University in Jordan experienced high level of writing apprehension. A valuable insight revealed by the findings of this current study was that teachers using the mother tongue, that is the Arabic language in an attempt to explain while teaching in the English writing class, was seen by respondents as a serious factor contributing to their high level of writing anxiety. Using Arabic in the writing classroom will not improve the students' proficiency level which in turn will affect their anxiety level and hence their ability to write in English.

Daly has conducted a series of studies (Daly, 1985; Daly & Miller, 1975; Fowler & Kroll, 1980) that confirmed that writers in English vary in writing apprehension. Students with more anxiety about writing are likely to be reluctant to pursue their writing tasks; they may ultimately select professions that require less writing. According to Lee and Krashen (1997), students tend to receive lower grades in composition courses, score lower on standardized tests of writing, and write essays that receive lower evaluations.

Writing anxiety can be minimized to the least degree through providing students with supportive feedback about their own progress. Wiltse (2002) stresses that the main objective of a teacher's role is to provide feedback and to

guide and help students to improve the quality of their written work. This can be done through teaching them to do things in a different or more effective way. Yet, teachers are not provided with guidelines on how to give an appropriate way of giving feedback on students' written assignments. Therefore, in these situations neither students nor their teachers benefit at all.

Self-efficacy is another factor that affects the students' ability to achieve their goals in general and to learn a language in particular. According to Pajeres and Johnson (1994, p. 314), self-efficacy beliefs affect students' behavior as it determines their ability to achieve their goals and the efforts they exert to achieve these goals. . Self-efficacy has a greatly connection to the students' thought patterns and emotional responses.

Abdel-Latif (2007) identified the factors that account for the Egyptian English majors negative writing and their effect on their high English writing apprehension and low English writing self-efficacy. Analyzing both types of data showed that there were six causes of the subjects' high English writing apprehension and four causes of their low English writing self-efficacy. These factors were the lack of linguistic knowledge, low foreign language competence self-esteem, poor history of writing achievement and perceived writing performance improvement, low English writing self-efficacy, instructional practices of English writing, fear of criticism and others' evaluation of the student's writing.

Several studies investigated writing anxiety in general but few studies dealt with writing anxiety in relation to self-efficacy (Abdel-Latif, 2007), whereas very few studies tackled the relationship between writing anxiety as a predictor of writing self-efficacy of special education Arab learners. Therefore, the current study attempted to fill in this gap in the literature by investigating the relationship between writing anxiety and self-efficacy in English for Arab learners of English. It also tried to test the ability of writing anxiety scores as a predictor of writing self-efficacy. In addition, it explored the differences between males and females in both writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy in English.

1.3 Questions of the Study

The present study addressed the following questions: Are there statistically significant differences between the mean scores of male and female primary stage special education pupils in both English anxiety and English writing self-efficacy?. It also tried to answer the second question: what is the relationship between writing self-efficacy and writing anxiety? In addition, it also tried to answer the third question: can writing anxiety predict writing self-efficacy.

2. Method

The current study adopted the descriptive research design. This research design is based on holding comparisons among subjects of the sample depending on the study variables (writing anxiety, writing self-efficacy).

2.1 The Sample of the Study

2.1.1 The Psychometric Sample of the Study

The psychometric sample of the study consisted of 60 primary school special education pupils (children with learning difficulties). Mean age of the study sample was 8.91 years old and their standard deviation was 1.98 years. The authors used the psychometric sample of the study to verify the psychometric efficacy of the study scale.

2.1.2 The Basic Sample of the Study

The basic sample of the study consisted of 90 primary school special education pupils (children with learning difficulties). The basic sample was used so as to verify the correlation study hypotheses. The basic sample of the study consisted of 43 male pupils and 47 female pupils with mean age 8.67 years and standard deviation (2.41) years.

2.2 Tools of the Study

2.2.1 English Writing Anxiety Scale [EWAS]

An English Writing Anxiety Scale was developed by Abdel Latif (2007). This scale was a mixture of selected and adapted items from three different measures: Gungle and Taylor's (1989) EISL version of the Daly-Miller writing Apprehension Test, Cheng's (2004) Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) (Avoidance behavior Subscale) and Graham et al. (1993) Attitudes toward writing scale. EWAS followed five-point Likert-Type scale where (1) refers to strongly agree, (2) refers to agree, (3) refers to uncertain, (4) refers to disagree, (5) refers to strongly disagree. Pupils scores ranged from (12) (the minimal score) to (60) (the maximal score).

It is worth noting that items 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 were negative items therefore they should be reversely scored.

Alpha Cronbach's reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.86. Also, the scale validity coefficients among items ranged from 0.41 to 0.64.

2.2.2 English Writing Self-Efficacy Scale [EWSS]

The English writing self-efficacy scale was developed by Abdel-Latif (2007) in order to measure the participants' English writing self-efficacy. This scale was divided into two parts; the first part consisted of eight items and used to measure pupils' ability, confidence and judgment of their general writing ability. This part of the scale was extracted from Gungl and Taylor (1989) ESL version of the Daly-Miller WAT, and Graham et al. (1993) writing self-efficacy Scale.

The second part of the scale consisted of eight items. It was extracted from Shell et al.'s (1989) writing efficacy scale (writing component skill subscale); there were two items extracted from Pajares and Valiante's (1999) writing skills self-efficacy scale, and the other one was developed by Abdel-Latif (2007). The scale followed a five-point Likert Scale where (1) refers to strongly agree, (2) means agree, (3) refers to being uncertain, (4) means disagree, (5) refers to being strongly disagree in the first part of the scale. The second part adopts a rubric ranges from (1) to (5). (1 = very unconfident, 5 = very confident). It is worth noting that items 1,3,4, and 7 were negative items. The pupils' score on this scale might range from 18 (the minimal score) to 90 (the maximal score). The final administration of the scale showed that the Alpha Cronbach's reliability coefficient of the two parts was (0.83). The scale validity coefficient among items was between 0.44-0.67.

2.3 Procedures of Administration

The process of administering the tools of the study went on successive stages:

1. The first stage: in this stage the authors randomly selected the sample of the study among special education primary school pupils (children with learning difficulties). This was done to verify the psychometric conditions of the scale.
2. The second stage: this stage included the administration of the diagnostic tools of the study which includes the writing anxiety scale and the writing self-efficacy scale.
3. The administration of the tools of the study took place in the second term (semester) of the scholastic years 2012-2013.

2.4 Statistical Analysis

Several statistical methods were used to answer the questions of the study and to verify the study variables. The researchers used the statistical package of social science (SPSS) in order to work out the following:

- 1) Descriptive Statistics which included:

Means and standard deviations

Alpha Cronbach's Coefficient

Pearson Correlation Coefficient.

- 2) Inferential Statistics which included:

T-tests to assess significance of mean difference of scores.

Linear Regression.

3. Results

3.1 The First Hypothesis

There are significantly significant differences between the scores of male and female pupils on both English Language Writing anxiety scale and English writing self-efficacy.

The researchers used a T-test in order to test the significance of the mean differences of scores of males and females.

Table 1. Mean scores, standard deviations and T-test values of males and females in tests of oral fluency and anxiety of speaking

Tests	Males (n=53)		Females (n=68)		T
	Mean	Std.Deviation	Mean	Std.Deviation	
Self-academy	34.85	5.50	35.32	0.388	0.388
Anxiety of Writing	57.37	7.94	59.41	10.63	1.035

** Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Close inspection of Table 1 indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of male and female primary stage special education pupils in both English writing anxiety and English writing self-efficacy.

3.2 The Second Hypothesis

There is a relationship between the writing anxiety and the writing self-efficacy scores of the sample of the study.

Table 2. The relationship between the writing anxiety and the writing self-efficacy

Correlations	Males (n=43)		Females (n=47)		Total(n=90)	
	Self-academy	Anxiety of Writing	Self-academy	Anxiety of Writing	Self-academy	Anxiety of Writing
Self-academy	1	0.216*	1	0.171	1	0.271*
Anxiety of Writing	0.216*	1	0.171	1	0.271*	1

** Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows Pearson correlation coefficients between Oral fluency and Anxiety of speaking of the Means (N=53) reveals that there is a negative relationship between writing self-efficacy and writing anxiety among primary stage special education pupils.

3.3 The Third Hypothesis

Writing anxiety scores may be able to predict the pupils' writing self-efficacy scores of the sample of the study.

The variables predictive ability of the Oral fluency differs as the performance competency on Anxiety of speaking differs.

Table 3. Writing anxiety scores as predictors the pupils' writing self-efficacy scores of the sample of the study.

	Dependent variables	Independent variables	Total sample= (90)				
			R	R 2	Beta	F	T value
Males (n=43)	Self-academy	Anxiety of Writing	0.271	0.74	0.271	3.59*	1.87*
	Constant		23.92				4.72**
Females (n=47)	Self-academy	Anxiety of Writing	0.171	0.029	0.171	1.24	1.011
	Constant		29.49				5.53**
Total(n=90)	Self-academy	Anxiety of Writing	0.216	0.047	0.216	4.250*	2.06*
	Constant		27.23				7.09**

** Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Close inspection of Table 3 revealed that the constant variable is statistically significant for the samples of males and females as well as the total sample of the study. Whereas, there is a statistically positive effect of writing anxiety on writing self-efficacy of both the males sample and the total sample of the study. This refers to the fact that the writing anxiety scores are able to predict the writing self-efficacy of the male pupils sample and the overall sample of the study.

4. Discussion

The data has revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of male and female primary stage special education pupils in both English writing anxiety and English writing self-efficacy. It seemed to be normal as male and female primary stage special education pupils suffer from the same learning difficulties. Therefore, they both suffer writing anxiety with the same degree.

Findings also revealed that there was a negative relationship between writing self-efficacy and writing anxiety among primary stage special education pupils. As it is mentioned beforehand, writing anxiety adversely influenced the pupils' ability to write effectively. Abdel-Latif (2007) revealed similar results as he focused on the relationship between writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy. Also, Al-Sawalha and Foo (2013) revealed that Arab students had high levels of writing anxiety which relates to their writing self-efficacy.

In addition, results revealed that the constant variable was statistically significant for the samples of males and females as well as the total sample of the study. there was a statistically positive effect of writing anxiety on writing self-efficacy of both the males sample and the total sample of the study. This refers to the fact that the writing anxiety scores are able to predict the writing self-efficacy of the male pupils sample and the overall sample of the study. This copes with the results obtained by Abdel-Latif (2007).

5. Conclusions

The same levels of writing anxiety was experienced by both male and female students with learning difficulties. This induce adopting the same intervention programs for alleviating students' writing anxiety and enhancing their writing self-efficacy.

Moreover, intervention should also include developing students' coping strategies that ensure ameliorating students' ability to get rid of anxiety of writing that will- in turn- enhance their writing self-efficacy.

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