

## Junior High School Students' Anxiety in English Essay Writing

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### ABSTRACT

Writing anxiety is a prevalent issue encounter by junior high school students, particularly when tasked with writing English essay. This study investigated anxiety factors faced by junior high school students in writing English essays. The research aims to identify the level and the types of anxiety faced by junior high school writing English essay. The study used mixed method. The data collected through questionnaires. The study's population 45 students at SMPN 29 Bengkulu Tengah. A close-ended questionnaire, adapted from the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) by Cheng (2004), and interview that used to assess levels of somatic, cognitive, and avoidance anxiety. This study revealed that majority of students felt high-anxiety (84.44%) in writing English essay. This study also discovered that, with a mean score of 30.67, cognitive anxiety is the most prevalent type of writing anxiety.

**Keywords:** Writing; Anxiety; Junior High School; Student, English Essay

### ABSTRAK

*Kecemasan menulis merupakan masalah umum yang dialami oleh siswa SMP, terutama ketika diberi tugas menulis esai bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menyelidiki faktor-faktor kecemasan yang dihadapi oleh siswa SMP dalam menulis esai bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi tingkat dan jenis kecemasan yang dihadapi oleh siswa SMP dalam menulis esai bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode campuran. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner. Populasi penelitian adalah 45 siswa di SMPN 29 Bengkulu Tengah. Kuesioner tertutup, diadaptasi dari Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) oleh Cheng (2004), dan wawancara yang digunakan untuk menilai tingkat kecemasan somatik, kognitif, dan penghindaran. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa mayoritas siswa merasakan kecemasan tinggi (84,44%) dalam menulis esai bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa, dengan skor rata-rata 30,67, kecemasan kognitif merupakan jenis kecemasan menulis yang paling umum.*

**Kata Kunci:** Menulis; Kecemasan; SMP; Siswa, Esai Bahasa Inggris

### INTRODUCTION

Writing considered one of the four language skills that should master by learners. It is an indispensable component, particularly for college students. In the University, writing has been prioritized as a crucial skill to be learned in both academic and non-academic contexts. Students with proficient writing skills can effortlessly complete writing assignments, including theses, proposals, and letters. Nunan (2003) argues that writing is a cognitive activity of formulating ideas and

considering their appropriate presentation in written form. To summarize, writing is a critical skill that university students must possess in order to effectively organize and present their ideas, which enable them to successfully complete a variety of academic and non-academic tasks.

It is crucial to teach pupils how to write as a productive ability, particularly in junior high school (Basonggo et al., 2016). Students can articulate to express their thoughts and emotions in written English. In addition Darus & Ching (2009) mention that student possessing proficiency and skill in English writing will be capable of articulating their thoughts effectively. However, writing is generally acknowledged as challenging task, particularly when it comes to writing scientific articles. Many students struggle and experience anxiety when face with academic writing task, including essay and article writing. Styati & Rodliyah (2021) stated that L2 learners encounter challenges, as they are required to not only acquire a comprehensive understanding of the features of texts with a well-organized structure and sufficient vocabulary but also employs diverse writing strategies while taking into account the context and intended audience. In addition, Sovann et al (2022) noted that writing a research article necessitates experience and proficiency in academic writing through ongoing practice with similar published works. Hence, it can be concluded that to overcome existing challenges and improve writing quality, writing an article requires not only technical skills, but also consistent experience.

The majority of students avoid writing due to the concern regarding the quality of their work. They are concerned about how they write and fear their writing will be judged. Students' writing will be influenced by their feelings, and worry is frequently linked to writing apprehension or anxiety (Wahyuni & Umam, 2017). In addition, Irawati et al (2022) added that in EFL classroom, writing anxiety might disrupt students' cohesive writing beliefs. They may eventually give up on writing altogether due to their nervousness before they ever attempt to write. Consequently, students who encountered excessive levels of anxiety may find it difficult to learn.

Writing an article is often accompanied by various psychological challenges, one of which is anxiety. Anxiety is a negative emotional condition and also generally triggered by items that the person believes will put pressure on them. This align with the assertion of Horwitz et al (1986) that stated anxiety will appear in specific situations related to certain events. Furthermore, Umuzdaş et al (2019) further describe anxiety as a situation in which people feel pressured by the possibility of bad things happening to them. Students' anxiety in writing article is not a new phenomenon. This anxiety can be triggered by various factors, that may not always be understood by students.

In Indonesia, the problem of anxiety associated with writing English essays is prevalent among numerous students, particularly those junior high school students. anxiety is a worry that a person experiences and is directly connected to unknown circumstances. According to Ajmal & Humaira, (2020), anxiety is a common psychological condition that is typified by emotions of worry and actions like

apprehension, dread, and lack of confidence. Anxiety over writing can be characterized as a fear that the writer may experience while they are in the writing process (Fareed et al., 2021). In addition, Oi (2023) stated that writing anxiety is believed to stem from early experiences characterized by the avoidance of writing, editing, and finalizing writing assignments. The phenomenon of anxiety in writing, often referred to as writing anxiety, can affect students' academic performance. Cheng (2004) classifies anxiety of writing into three types: cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance anxiety.

There were some previous researchers that had been conducted study regarding to anxiety that faced by students in learning foreign language. The first one is research that conducted by Irawati et al (2022). This research revealed that among EFL students, cognitive and somatic anxiety were identified as most prevalent types. In addition, this study identified effective methods for enhancing EFL writing skills across three dimensions: correctness, complexity, and fluency. Afdalia et al (2023) analyzed about writing anxiety faced by EFL students and strategies that used in writing article. The study's finding identified that the prominent kind of writing anxiety encountered in the composition English journal articles was avoidance behavior, followed by somatic anxiety and cognitive anxiety. Another research is from Pongsapan (2022). The study revealed that three primary factors of writing anxiety among students: communication apprehension, exam anxiety, and fear of receiving a poor grade. Among these, communication apprehension was the most common. Another study from Pratiwi (2021) found that accounts for 71.43% of the overall level of writing anxiety. It also revealed, with a mean score of 26.37, the predominant anxiety was cognitive anxiety. Upon examining the rationale behind writing, linguistic challenges emerged as the primary cause of concern. This research was developed from the previous study. The result of previous study above showed students anxiety in university. Although many studies have been conducted on writing anxiety among university students, fewer studies have investigated this phenomenon among junior high school students, particularly in the context of EFL in Indonesia. Focusing on higher education environments leaves a significant gap in understanding the psychological barriers faced by younger students when writing essays in English. Considering that early exposure and intervention can be crucial for long-term writing development, there is a need to investigate writing anxiety at the junior high school level.

To address this gap, this research aims to investigate the factors of anxiety encountered by junior high school students in writing English essays. The research is guided by the following question: What are the levels and types of anxiety experienced by junior high school students in writing English essays? Thus, the aim of this research is to identify the types and levels of writing anxiety that are dominant in this context. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on junior high school students, offering new insights into writing anxiety at the early stages of EFL education in Indonesia. These findings are expected to contribute to more effective

teaching strategies and interventions to reduce anxiety and improve writing performance among young learners.

## **METHOD**

The research aims to reveal anxiety factors encountered by junior high school students in writing article. In order to accomplish research objective, the researcher used mix-method. Creswell (2012) defines mixed method as a method in which the researcher used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to integrate findings, develop conclusions, and interpret data-relevant information. This study used an explanatory sequential mixed method design, initially gathering quantitative data, subsequently followed by qualitative data to elucidate the quantitative findings. The research was executed by distributing questionnaires to participants for data collection. Then, the data collected from questionnaires were examined by using quantitative approach to find out factors of anxiety experienced by junior high school students n writing English essay.

All of students at SMPN 29 Bengkulu Tengah chosen as the population for this research. Total number of the population is 45 students. The students were selected based on their previous experience in writing essay. Their experience made them familiar with writing an article. The total sampling technique was employed to select research samples. Therefore, total number of the research samples was 45 students.

The researcher employed interviews and questionnaires as instruments to gather data from the subjects of the research. In this research, the researcher employed close-ended questionnaire to obtain data from subjects of the research. This study used the scores of questionnaires to determine writing anxiety level of students. Students with scores were less than 50 as low anxiety, those with scores ranging from 50 to 65 grouped as having moderate anxiety whereas scores greater than 65 classed as high anxiety (Pratiwi, 2021). The researcher adapt the questionnaire derived from Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) by Cheng (2004) and adapted interview guidelines from Pratiwi (2021). An instrument called the SLWAI measures a student's level of anxiety when writing in a second language. Moreover, somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, and avoidance behavior anxiety are the three sub-scales that make up this questionnaire. Five-point Likert scales are used in the questionnaire: 1 for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 neutral, 4 for agree, and 5 for strongly agree. The researcher administered the questionnaire by using Google Forms to facilitate students' access to the survey from anywhere.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Table 1.** *Student's level of anxiety*

	Number Students	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Percentage
Total	45	44	89	100%
High anxiety	38	72	89	84.44%
Moderate anxiety	5	54	64	11.11%
Low anxiety	2	44	47	4.44%

Table 1 showed that out of 45 students at SMPN 29 Bengkulu Tengah, 84.55% exhibited high levels of anxiety. Students exhibiting a moderate level of writing anxiety constituted 11.44%, whereas those with low levels were just 4.44%. As a result, the majority of EFL students at SMPN 29 Bengkulu Tengah reported high levels of writing anxiety. The study, after evaluating anxiety level, then categorized them into three primary groups: cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior. To identify these categories, the study relied on the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) by Cheng (2004).

**Table 2.** *Student's types of anxiety*

Types of Anxiety	Number of students	Total score	Mean
Cognitive	45	1380	30,67
Somatic	45	1166	25,91
Avoidance Behavior	45	1136	25,29

Table 2 revealed that the average score for cognitive anxiety was 30.67, subsequent to somatic anxiety at 25.91 and avoidance behavior at 25.29. This indicates that cognitive anxiety had the highest average score among the three types. Somatic anxiety ranked second highest, whilst avoidance behavior had a low mean. To put it differently, cognitive anxiety recognized as the most prevalent type of writing anxiety faced by students in writing English essay.

**Interview**

**A. Students with low anxiety**

The interview transcription was used to understand the reason of their anxiety in writing. This study conducted interviews with two students from each category who showed low levels of anxiety. They stated that they preferred writing

essay in English rather than Indonesian, and did not mind writing in English. They also viewed the teacher's feedback as motivation to enhance their skills in writing, not as a burden.

*"I like writing in English better because it feels exciting. I can learn new words in English, and it makes me happy when I can write something correctly". (CR)*

*"I prefer writing in English because it feels more interesting. It also helps me practice my English skills". (FS)*

*"No, I don't feel pressured. I just try my best and focus on what I want to say in my essay. Even if I make mistakes, I think it's okay because I can always learn and improve". (CR)*

*"No, I do not feel pressured. I think writing English essay is a chance to share my ideas, and I enjoy it. I just try to stay relaxed and write it step by step". (FS)*

*"I feel happy when I get feedback. It is more like advice to make my writing better". (CR)*

*"I feel their feedback helps me a lot. It makes me want to do better and fix my mistakes. I don't see it as a burden because it's like they are guiding me to improve". (FS)*

In summary, students who experienced low levels of writing anxiety due to external factors, such as feedback or judgment that comes from their teacher or peers, did not intimidate them. Additionally, they felt confident in their writing skill in English due to their mastery in the language. Nonetheless, as an EFL learner, writing anxiety could arise when faced with increasing demands or higher expectations in writing tasks.

### **B. Students with moderate anxiety**

The interview results indicated moderate anxiety in writing English essays. Students exhibit increased confidence and comfort in articulating their ideas in their native language. Writing English essay often feels more challenging due to concerns about grammar and vocabulary.

*"I prefer writing in Bahasa Indonesia because it feels easier and I do not worry too much about making mistake. Writing in English is harder for me because I sometimes feel unsure about grammar and vocabulary". (DA)*

*"Yes, I feel a little pressured when writing academic texts because I want my essay to be correct and good. I worry about making mistakes in grammar and not using the right words, so it makes me overthink sometimes". (SR)*

*"I feel both, sometimes. Their feedback helps me improve, but it can also make me feel nervous because I think I need to do everything perfectly. However, I try to see it as a way to learn and get better. (SR)*

In conclusion, students with moderate writing anxiety tend to prefer writing in Bahasa Indonesia because they feel more confident and comfortable expressing their ideas in their native language. Writing an English essay often feels more challenging due to concerns about grammar and vocabulary. They also feel some pressure because of the high standards, such as the need for proper grammar, suitable word choices, and clear organization of ideas, which can lead to overthinking and stress. However, despite feeling nervous about teacher feedback, they appreciate it as a useful tool and motivation to improve their writing skills.

### **C. Students with high anxiety**

The interview transcription below demonstrated high levels of writing anxiety. According to the writing essay in Bahasa Indonesia was preferable to writing it in English. They viewed feedback from the teacher as a burden rather than as motivation

*"I prefer writing in Bahasa Indonesia because it feels much easier. Writing in English makes me overthink, especially when I don't know how to say what I want. Sometimes I get stuck for a long time, trying to figure out the right words". (JM)*

*"Yes, I feel really pressured, especially when there's a time limit. I often don't know how to start, and it makes me panic. Writing in English feels extra hard because I keep worrying about making mistakes, and I get stuck thinking about grammar and word choices" (JM)*

*"I feel really scared of feedback because I don't want my teacher to show my work to the class or use it as an example. It's embarrassing, and I feel judged by my friends. I also worry about getting a low score, which makes me feel like I'm not good at writing. Feedback helps, but it still makes me very anxious". (SR)*

In result, students with high writing anxiety faced significant challenges when writing in English, particularly in academic contexts. They prefer writing in Bahasa Indonesia as it feels easier and less stressful. Writing in English often causes them to overthink, especially when they have difficulties in finding the right words in organizing their ideas. Time constraints further amplify their anxiety, as they feel rushed and unsure of what to write. Feedback from teachers, while helpful in improving skills, is a major source of stress. Students fear being judged, embarrassed, or used as an example in front of the class. This fear, coupled with concerns about

grades, makes feedback feel more like a burden than motivation. These factors collectively contribute to their high anxiety, making writing English essay as a daunting experience.

### **Discussion**

This study discovered that the majority of students at SMPN 29 Bengkulu Tengah experience high levels of writing anxiety. They faced anxiety in the academic setting such as they prefer writing essay in Bahasa Indonesia, as it feels less stressful. They feel that writing essay in English causes difficulty in organizing the ideas and time pressure. Teacher feedback, while helpful, becomes a source of stress due to fears of judgement, embarrassment, and concerns about grades, making the writing process more daunting. The study also mentioned that cognitive anxiety was the most prevalent type of writing anxiety among EFL students at SMPN 29 Bengkulu Tengah. This finding aligns with Pratiwi (2021). The study identified that the most dominant type of writing anxiety was cognitive anxiety. The majority of EFL students in Indonesia experience writing anxiety because they tend to overthink the feedback or judgments from their teachers and peers. They are also afraid that their English essays will receive poor grades. The students believe that experiencing cognitive anxiety, automatically stimulates their bodies leading to feelings of fear and nervousness when expressing their thoughts in English essays.

Somatic anxiety emerged as the second most prevalent anxiety faced by students in writing English essay. Students experienced confusion and did not know what to do when unexpectedly tasked with composing an English essay especially under time constraint. The findings of this study align with Apriani et al., (2023) mentioned that students perceive that the time allocated for writing task is insufficient due to the large number of assignments and tight deadlines. Somatic anxiety referred to the physical impact of anxiety, often seen as increased "autonomic arousal and uncomfortable emotional states like nervousness and tension." In terms of anxiety levels, somatic anxiety was most commonly encountered by participants with high anxiety. This indicates that students with higher anxiety levels felt its physical effects. This finding aligns with research by Kurt and Atay (2006), which showed that highly anxious students tended to experience somatic anxiety. The study added that a major reason for this was their difficulty in organizing thoughts and generating new ideas.

Avoidance behavior, as the least frequent form of writing anxiety, was found in this study. This type of behavior relates to the students' actions, often taking the shape of avoiding enrollment in writing courses. Rahim et al (2016) revealed that the primary reason behind students exhibiting avoidance behavior is their limited proficiency in writing conventions, particularly in areas such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. This sense of inhibition negatively affects their interest in writing in English. Consequently, despite years of studying the language, students still struggle with essay writing and often avoid it whenever possible. This aligns with the

study from Masriani et al (2018) that stated their inhibition adversely affects their interest in writing in English. Consequently, despite years of language instruction, their inability to compose excellent essays in English leads them to minimize their writing.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the findings offer important perspectives on the writing anxiety encountered by EFL students when writing English essays. The majority of students felt a high level of anxiety. Furthermore, the students at SMPN 29 Bengkulu Tengah faced the most prevalent type of writing anxiety: cognitive anxiety. Somatic anxiety and avoidance behavior follow. However, there are several reasons why students encounter high levels of writing anxiety. Students who exhibit high levels face significant difficulties when writing in English, especially in an academic environment. They prefer to write in Indonesian because it feels easier and less stressful. Writing in English often makes them overthink, especially when they struggle with vocabulary or structure, and time pressure worsens their anxiety. Teachers' intended guidance actually exacerbates their stress, as they fear judgment, embarrassment, and worry about grades. These factors make writing English essays a challenging and burdensome task.

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