

# INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS' WRITING ANXIETY IN POST-PANDEMIC ONLINE CLASSROOM CONTEXT: A SURVEY

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## **INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS' WRITING ANXIETY IN POST-PANDEMIC ONLINE CLASSROOM CONTEXT: A SURVEY**

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### **Abstract**

ESL and EFL students consider writing as challenging in both cognitive and affective aspects. In ideal circumstances, they may suffer from difficulties during the writing process, including anxiety or even tension. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic condition has made the teaching and learning writing more complicated due to limited time and space to meet, to discuss, to collaborate, and to give as well as take feedbacks for their writing. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the types of writing anxiety experienced by EFL students in online Creative Writing class during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia context. The research utilizes a quantitative method, specifically a survey technique. The online survey is administered to 124 participants of English Education Department at the fourth semester. To assess the levels and types of writing anxiety, the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) established by Cheng (2004) was utilized in this study. The SLWAI was the first reliable instrument for assessing writing anxiety, particularly in a second or foreign language context. The results of this study show that the most common type of participants' writing anxiety is Avoidance Behavior (66.13%) then followed by Cognitive Anxiety (20.97%), and Somatic Anxiety (12.90%) as the minor type. The Avoidance Behavior type includes behavioral components of anxiety, such as the avoidance of writing. In conclusion, students of Avoidance Behavior type with have a normal level of nervousness since they seek to avoid writing situations. This study suggests that school teachers be more prepared to create online writing classroom atmosphere

**Keywords:** creative writing, levels of writing anxiety, types of writing anxiety, writing anxiety

### **INTRODUCTION**

Several academic researchers report that lack of confidence, motivation for achievement, self-efficiency, and a sense of anxiety negatively influence EFL performance (Sabti & Rashid, 2019). The study by Sabti & Rashid (2019b) found that 54.0% of 100 EFL students English Education Department in Iraq had a high level of writing anxiety, and 63.0% of them have a low motivation for writing. Therefore, the reports raise the question of whether this issue arises in various writing classes around the world, including Indonesia.

Moreover, writing is seen by many ESL and EFL writers as a complex task because of its intricate character combined with a lack of vocabulary in their repertoire of writers and a handicap with their grammatical knowledge of the English language (Sabti & Rashid, 2019). Moreover, writing is also considered as a cognitive linguistic activity involving higher comprehension of thinking so that concepts can be organized and thoughts can be articulated in a more comprehensible way (Jennifer, 2017). Thus, EFL students may face difficult, anxious, or even stressful writing experiences that vary among students (Alico, 2016) that is known as foreign language writing anxiety.

Writing anxiety is an emotional type of fear, self-confidence loss, and people's motivation to write (Suryoputro et al. 2020), a persistent sensation that is neither ready to writes nor strong enough to compose (Jawas, 2019), and not being good enough to write (Yu, 2020). It is because, writing is perceived as a tough ability (Umam, 2017). On the other hand, Ariyanti (2017) says

that anxiety is like a virus that affects the students' learning performance. This is harmful to the improvement of students and imposes a clear barrier to thinking. Second-language writing anxiety means negative emotions, which interfere in several parts of the process of writing (Aloairdhi, 2019). These emotions, however, do not generally define a person's writing life. Since writing anxiety does not characterize psychological characteristics, students may feel anxious in some situations due to their bad or difficult experience of writing (Yu, 2020). Although several studies reveal that anxiety has a negative link with language performance (Bensalem, 2017), it influences each other indirectly; anxiety and achievement are associated (Wacana et al. 2018). This writing anxiety do not pervasively characterize a person's writing life and it is naturally situational. It also does not describe psychological attributes; students are likely to experience the anxiety in particular contexts caused by their negative or difficult experiences with writing.

There are three related situations of anxieties, namely communication apprehension, testing anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Subekti, 2018). First, communication apprehension is a form of timidity that describes as fear or fear of communicating with others (Bensalem, 2017). This refers to an individual's degree of anxiety when interacting with others. Moreover, several studies show that contact apprehension is an underlying cause of anxiety. Second, test anxiety is "the sort of anxiety about success that comes out in an academic assessment setting because of anxiety about failure." It refers to anxiety that students may have in an examination situation. Many studies report that testing causes anxiety (Bensalem, 2017). Third, the fear of negative assessment refers "to an awareness of the judgments of others and the avoidance of assessment conditions" (Bensalem, 2017).

Meanwhile, related to types of writing anxiety, there are three types of writing anxiety: Cognitive and somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior (Cheng, 2004). First is cognitive anxiety that shows negative expectations, preoccupation with performance. Second is somatic anxiety that refers to physiological effects of anxiety a person experiences such as nervousness, tension, and trembling. Third is avoidance behaviour that refers to behavioral aspects of anxiety experience, such as avoidance of writing.

Following the announcement of the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus, educational institute closures were immediately considered (Mahmood, 2021). For this reason, teaching and learning activities are moving from traditional face-to-face education to emergency remote learning to reduce the spread of the virus. Furthermore, writing during pandemics becomes more difficult. The field view is reduced because the media and everyday conversation focus on the effects of the pandemic.

There are some previous studies relates to writing anxiety. The first study is conducted by Miri & Joia (2018) explores students' undergraduate experiences with writing anxiety. Then, Balta (2018) investigates the relationships among students' argumentative text writing skills, writing anxiety, and metacognitive awareness. The next study by Aloairdhi (2019) focuses on revealing the types of writing anxiety among participants which are female students of the English Department at some Saudi universities. The last study is by Suryoputro et. al., (2020) which surveys 219 Indonesian EFL students of secondary school, high school, and university levels to examine the types and levels of writing anxiety.

However, the current study is different from the previous studies. While the previous studies discussed the experiences with writing anxiety, the relationship between writing anxiety and writing skill, and types and levels of EFL students of secondary school, high school, and university levels, this study focuses on finding out which types of EFL students' writing anxiety in online Creative Writing class during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding this, there are several reasons why online Creative Writing Class is chosen to be the place for the research. This online Creative Writing Class is prepared to help students learning to write in less-tension atmosphere. Several apps are used to help students learn to write effectively and enjoyably. The experienced lecturer is selected. Several apps are used: Edmodo and Whatsapp. Edmodo is used to help both students and teachers manage the teaching learning activities and anticipate problems in communication. This is considered potentially effective in

facilitating communication between fellow teachers, fellow students, between teachers and students, and parents of students or students can be directly involved in the platform as controlling to monitor the platform (Halil, 2020). Communication becomes one of the main issues that frequently appears in online teaching during pandemic in Emergency Remote Teaching context in Indonesia.

Moreover, the Whatsapp group is also used by lecturers for applying collaborative learning methods. Students are divided into several small groups which are used for peer-reviewing their writing drafts before its being uploaded to Edmodo. The significant role of this method is the interaction between students and their teacher or among themselves is essential for creating a beneficial condition that leads to their advancement through their zone of proximal development (Abdullah, Hussin, & Shakir, 2018). The study by Fatimah (2018) finds out that English Education Department students require input from both their lecturer and their classmates. In terms of means, however, students demand more feedback from the lecturer.

Basically, there are some differences between face-to-face Creative Writing (FCW) learning and online Creative Writing (OCW) learning. According to Yusri (2018), students in OCW received feedback on their posts, whereas students in FCW received orally and handwritten feedback directly on their written work. In OCW, after receiving feedback from the teacher, most students did not respond or ask questions about the input, nor did they follow the teacher's feedback, although the tools were provided to do so. There was some interaction between the teacher and the students in FCW while the teacher walked around the classroom checking on students' progress. These interactions may motivate pupils to write more, provide ideas, or assist with grammatical problems. There were interactions between readers and writers in FCW, such as asking for clarification and utilizing gestures to check their understanding, based on observations. Following reader feedback, the writers requested detailed explanations on how they may improve their work. The authors and readers reached an agreement on how to improve the novel. The writers then modified their stories in response to the comments that they agreed to follow. Unlike the OCW, where readers made comments but received no replies or questions, there were no replies or queries on the feedback. Therefore, students who met face-to-face had a stronger sense of community than those who studied online, due to the lack of contact between readers and writers (Yusri, 2018). In short, the online creative writing class has several crucial weaknesses. Some of the impacts include the decreased activity or interaction of students in class and decreased students' motivation because online learning is considered more complex. Thus, it may cause writing anxiety among students.

## METHOD

This study utilizes a quantitative method, specifically a survey technique. Quantitative research deals with the collection and analysis of data which is organized and can be numerically represented. One of the main objectives is to develop precise and reliable statistical analysis measurements (Goertzen, 2017). The quantitative research method focuses on objectivity and is particularly suitable when quantifiable measurements of variables and inferences from population samples are collected (Almeida, et al. 2017).

In this study, the survey technique is used to collect the data. The survey technique is a form of study that enables the collecting data directly from participants via several issues arranged in a particular order. In addition, the survey is also designed to collect information from the group/population to provide sampling questionnaires, questionnaire design, and questionnaire administration, and then review to better understand their behavior (Sukamolson, (2007) in Apuke (2017).

The participants of this study are fourth-semester students of the English Education Department at a State Islamic University in Bandung who have taken a Creative Writing course. The total participants of this study is 124 students. The current study selects participants using sample size formulas. The sample size formula is the most suitable sampling technique for survey

study. The bigger the sample size, the lower the chance that the sample diverges from the population (Creswell, 2012).

This study used SLWAI questionnaire to obtain the data. This scale is created by Cheng (2004) to investigate the types and levels of writing anxiety. The SLWAI was the first reliable instrument for assessing writing anxiety, particularly in a second or foreign language. This inventory has been chosen as an instrument of writing anxiety because correlation and factor analysis have been established to be extremely trustworthy and valid. The whole process of calculating data using Ms. Excel and SPSS v28. In addition, all of the data collection is calculated to answer the research questions. As a result, the research findings were accurately examined to provide useful descriptions and referrals to other sources.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Types of Writing Anxiety Experienced by the Participants

This section presents the relevant data to the first research question: students' writing anxiety type. It provides the participant's responses towards 22 SLWAI questionnaire items. The test held on August 15, 2021. The total number of participants of this study is 124 students. This amount is in accordance with the target of research participants. Table 4.1 displays the descriptive statistics of the types of writing anxiety of all participants. The types of writing anxiety for each participant were represented by the total score of every item.

Table 1. Result of EFL students' types of writing anxiety

Types of Writing Anxiety	N	Min. score	Max. Score	Mean	Percentage
Somatic	16	7	34	17.80	12.90%
Avoidance	88	14	35	23.27	66.13%
Cognitive	26	10	37	21.65	20.97%

Note:

- N = Number of participants
- Min. Score = Minimum score of anxiety level
- Max. Score = Maximum score of anxiety level
- Mean = Average of scores

The statistics from Table 1 reveal that the most common type of writing anxiety among EFL writers is Avoidance Behavior. It was experienced by 88 from 124 (66.13%) students. This type refers to behavioral aspects of anxiety experience, such as avoidance of writing (Cheng, 2004). As a result of writing anxiety, individuals limit themselves to improvising in writing (Liestyana, 2020). Therefore, they avoid writing whenever possible because they are still unable to produce proper essays in English, despite spending years mastering the language (Masriani & Wahyuni, 2018). This writing avoidance is caused by several reasons Rahim, et.al (2016) First, low writing competencies are manifested in grammar, word choices, and sentence building. Second, low confidence in a language has resulted in hesitation among student writers, reducing their enthusiasm for writing. As a consequence, they would be able to avoid most English writing situations, despite its being the years they become EFL students, they still struggle to structure proper English writing. This shows that students are more afraid to try writing to avoid mistakes. Table 2 below shows students' answers to each question for this type.

Table 2. Item Questionnaire Avoidance Behavior

No	Item	Frequency					Mean
		SA	A	N	DA	SDA	
1.	I often choose to write down my thoughts in English.	10	44	56	14	0	3.40
2.	I usually do my best to avoid writing English compositions.	3	26	42	43	10	3.25
3.	I do my best to avoid situations in which I have to write in English.	4	14	36	54	16	3.52
4.	Unless I have no choice, I would not use English to write.	6	19	44	47	8	3.26
5.	If asked to write English compositions, I would do my best to excuse myself.	38	0	76	7	3	3.51
6.	Usually, I'm looking for every opportunity to write English compositions outside of class.	12	0	97	12	3	3.05
7.	I will use English to write compositions whenever possible.	21	0	100	0	3	3.29

Notes:

SA = Strongly Agree

A = Agree

N = No strong feelings either way

DA = Disagree

SDA = Strongly Disagree

Table 2 shows the highest mean score of 3.52 is for the statement of “avoiding the situation to write using English”. Then the lowest mean score of 3.05 for the statement “students usually looking for every opportunity to write English compositions outside of class.” This finding is in line with the study conducted by Wern (2021) where students prefer avoiding situations to write English compositions rather than looking for opportunities to write English compositions outside the classroom. According to Bensalem (2017), this phenomenon comes out in an academic assessment setting because of anxiety about failure. Thus, students who prefer avoiding writing situations may be more likely to have a lower quality of writing.

Besides of analyzing the statements with the highest and lowest mean, some statements are also interesting to discuss. One of them is the statement "I will use English to write processes whenever possible" which obtained a no strong feelings either way response from 100 people. This demonstrates that students are unsure whether to agree or disagree with this statement. Students in this situation lack confidence and will only write in English if they are asked to (Moses & Mohamad, 2019).

This finding is a bit surprising because students of English Education are expected to be able to acquire this skill. Moreover, the Creative Writing course has a relaxed and enjoyable impression because students are free to express their creative ideas in writing. Furthermore, the behavior of avoiding situations in which they must write in English will affect their writing ability (Jawas, 2019). Indeed, Cheng (2004) claims that this is the most hazardous type of writing anxiety because students will avoid writing.

This type of writing anxiety has a negative impact on the students' writing performance because they believe that they do not have strong English language competence and are discouraged from composing the English writing task (Rodriguez & Abreu, 2003; Ariyanti, 2017). This means that students' motivation and attitude toward learning as well as their self-confidence, are strongly influenced by worry (Liu, 2012; Ariyanti, 2017). Concerning this study, the participants of this study are in a dangerous type of writing anxiety. Teachers are expected to give a positive mindset and create a comfortable and enjoyable learning environment in order to make students not afraid to attend writing class or even prefer to avoid the writing situation.

Then, the second common type of writing anxiety among EFL students in this study is Cognitive Anxiety which is experienced by 26 students (20.97%). Cognitive anxiety refers to the cognitive element of anxiety experience, which includes negative perceptions, performance, and concern about how others see them. Expectations from other students or teachers can have a big impact on how students write. For example, if the teacher has high expectations, the students must meet those expectations. It can have an impact on students' writing since they will be more concerned with fulfilling the standards of others rather than their own (Umam, 2017).

Table 3. Item Questionnaire Cognitive Anxiety

No	Item	Frequency					Mean
		SA	A	N	DA	SDA	
1.	I am not nervous at all while writing in English.	8	0	79	36	1	2.82
2.	I feel worried and uncomfortable when writing English compositions if I know they're going to be evaluated.	17	60	25	60	17	2.46
3.	I am not worried that my compositions in English are much worse than others.	8	34	22	40	20	2.76
4.	I would worry about getting a very poor grade if I were to evaluate my English composition.	34	60	16	12	2	2.10
5.	I am worried that if other students read it, they would mock my English composition.	23	32	26	28	15	2.84
6.	I don't care at all about what other people would think about my English compositions.	36	29	33	16	10	3.04
7.	I'm afraid that my English composition was chosen as a sample for class discussion.	17	42	41	16	8	2.65
8.	I'm not afraid at all that my English compositions are considered to be very poor.	8	38	32	37	9	2.99

## Notes:

- SA = Strongly Agree
- A = Agree
- N = No strong feelings either way
- DA = Disagree
- SDA = Strongly Disagree

Table 3 shows the highest mean score 3.04 for the statement "they do not care what other people think about their English composition." The number of students who choose strongly agree is the highest one with a total of 36 students. It means that the most of them still worry about other people think about their English composition. Then, the lowest mean score is 2.10 for the statement "I would worry about getting a very poor grade if I were to evaluate my English composition." These findings are in line with the statement by Cheng (2004) who says that students with cognitive anxiety always worry about their performance and their written work, as well as thinking about how others perceive them.

Several important statements are also interesting to be discussed. One of them is the statement "I am worried that if other students read it, they would mock my English composition." This statement refers to the concept of readership in the writing class. This is actually good for students to be able to give each other feedback. However, the inability to manage this awareness of the readers' existence will be negative when it can cause anxiety in students. This theory is supported by Rahim et al., (2016) who say that in Indonesia, teachers are often the primary readers

and students as the second evaluators of students' works. There is pressure to produce excellent work, and the expectations of the students are not always met. As a result, this research found that the score obtained is evenly distributed on each option, thus it can be concluded that almost all students experience anxiety because of demand and expectation.

The statement "I would worry about getting a very poor grade if I were to evaluate my English composition" is also interesting to analyze. Participants who agree to this statement reach up to 60 people. This shows that most of them are worried about getting a low grade for their writing. This situation can occur before writing, after writing, or even this feeling of worry will haunt students from before writing until the issuance of grades for their writing.

The implications of these findings for teaching and learning writing are that making teachers easier to know what to do, thus students enjoy the Creative Writing class. This can be used as an evaluation for lecturer of Creative Writing course to provide understanding to students that this peer review activity is very good to do. It because this activity will make a good impact on students' development of writing skills.

Table 4. Item Questionnaire Somatic Anxiety

No	Item	Frequency					Mean
		SA	A	N	DA	SDA	
1.	When I write English under time limitations, I feel my heart pounding.	30	53	30	9	2	2.19
2.	When I start to work on English composition, my mind often goes blank.	19	49	36	17	3	2.48
3.	When I write in English under the pressure of time, I tremble or perspire.	16	51	27	23	7	2.63
4.	When I write English compositions under time limitations, my thoughts become jumbled.	26	60	19	15	4	2.28
5.	When I write English compositions under time constraints, I often panic.	25	62	19	14	4	2.27
6.	When I asked to write English compositions suddenly, I freeze up.	10	45	35	25	9	2.82
7.	When I write English compositions, I normally feel my whole body rigid and tense.	6	31	40	37	10	3.11

## Notes:

SA = Strongly Agree

A = Agree

N = No strong feelings either way

DA = Disagree

SDA = Strongly Disagree

Table 4. shows the highest mean score of item questionnaire Somatic Anxiety is 3.11 for the statement "When I write English compositions, I normally feel my whole-body rigid and tense". Then, the lowest mean score is 2.19 for the statement "When I write English under time limitations, I feel my heart pounding". This finding is in line with Wern (2021) which finds that students with Somatic Anxiety their whole body will feel rigid and tense.

Besides discussing the highest and the lowest mean score statements for this type, the other statements above are also interesting to be analyze. One of them is the statement "When I start to work on English composition, my mind often goes blank". This statement is closely related to the concept of brainstorming when writing (Bozkurt et al., 2016). The teacher is expected to direct students to brainstorm before writing. It because this is important for students to know what they are going to write.



From the data in the tables above, Avoidance Behavior has the highest mean, Cognitive Anxiety is second, and Somatic Anxiety has the lowest mean. Among the two types of writing anxiety, Avoidance Behavior is the most common type. As a result, Figure 1 describes Avoidance Behavior becomes the major type of writing anxiety among students in the 4th semester of the English Education Department at State Islamic University in Bandung.

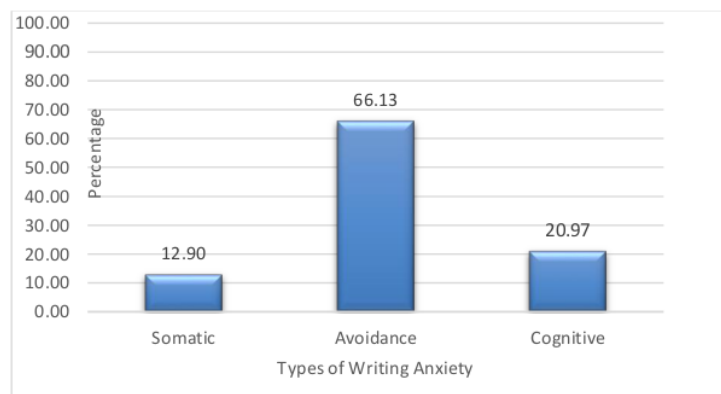


Figure 1. Percentage Types of EFL Students' Writing Anxiety

The identification of Avoidance Behavior to be the most common type of students' writing anxiety in this study is an interesting finding. This is due to the fact that this type is the most hazardous type. This become an ironic fact because students of English Education in this study are prefer to avoid writing situations. Indicated in Figure 1, the results of the survey reveal that Avoidance Behavior (66.13%,  $M=23.27$ ) was the major type of writing anxiety among students in the 4th semester in the English Education Department at the State Islamic University in Bandung. These findings are in line with Liestyana (2020) found that the common type of writing anxiety among EFL students in Indonesia is Avoidance Behavior ( $M = 26.39$ ). Another research that found Avoidance Behavior ( $M=23.95$ ) became the dominant type is conducted by Kusumaningputri & Ningsih (2018).

Avoidance behavior relates to the behavioral components of anxiety feeling, such as avoidance of writing. As a result of writing anxiety, individuals limit themselves to improvising in writing (Liestyana, 2020). Therefore, they avoid writing whenever possible because they are still unable to produce proper essays in English, despite spending years mastering the language (Masriani & Wahyuni, 2018). The discovery of the Avoidance Behavior type become the most common type of students' writing anxiety in the online Creative Writing class is quite surprising. It because this course is seen as a fun course. However, this research shows that students prefer to avoid writing situations. Then, the widespread avoidance of writing is described by Rezaei & Jafari (2014) in Liestyana (2020), in which individuals confine themselves to exactly improvise in writing.

Thus, the teachers can use these findings as a reference in order to help students develop their writing skills. Indeed, teachers must be able to recognize their students' types of writing anxiety in order to create a helpful teaching and learning environment.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Avoidance Behavior has the highest mean; Cognitive Anxiety is second; and Somatic Anxiety has the lowest mean. Avoidance Behavior becomes the major type of writing anxiety among students in the 4th semester of the English Education Department. The identification of Avoidance Behavior to be the most common type of students' writing anxiety in this study is an interesting finding, since Creative Writing Course is seen as a course that provides students with fun. Then, this is due to the fact that this variety is the most hazardous type. This become an ironic fact because students of English Education in this study are prefer to avoid writing situations. The implications of these findings for teaching and learning writing are that making teachers easier to know what to do, thus students enjoy the Creative Writing class. This can be used as an evaluation for lecturer of Creative Writing course to provide understanding to students that this peer review activity is very good to do. It because this activity will make a good impact on students' development of writing skills. Indeed, teachers must be able to recognize their students' types of writing anxiety in order to create a helpful teaching and learning environment. In terms of anxiety investigation, many things should be addressed beyond the types of writing anxiety related to Creative Writing. To present a broader research scope, any other probable element causing which related to writing anxiety, such as learners/teachers belief in a foreign language, teaching method, or task engagement, is supposed to be examined in future similar research. Furthermore, the addition of instruments to obtain deeper data such as interviews is also recommended.

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