

Reasons of EFL Students' Anxiety in Writing Scientific Paper

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ABSTRACT

This research mainly attempts to find out the reasons why students experienced the writing anxiety. The research is done by qualitative research method. The participants contributed in this research are 11 English department students of UIN Sumatera Utara. The data are collected by using interview to explore the reasons or causes of students' writing anxiety. The finding shows that the causal factor of students' writing anxiety are resulted from Lack of Topic Interest, Teacher's Teaching Style, Plagiarism Threat, High Amount of Assignments, Grammar and Vocabulary Insecurity, Pressure of Perfect Writing, and Lack of Practice. Furthermore, most of the students have anxiety due to the fact of students' incapability in handling their anxiety experience to deal with the complicated scientific writing subject in terms of its standards, rules, and the assigning writing topics. The students also have the insufficient prior or initial practice and knowledge to get themselves accustomed and comprehended to write a paper scientifically. Related to the issues of writing anxiety, this study also further suggests that students necessarily need to be well-trained about composing a scientific paper properly in order to minimize the writing anxiety experience.

Keywords: *EFL students, writing, anxiety, writing anxiety, scientific writing*

1. INTRODUCTION

In university realm, writing is considered as a main skill that needs to be mastered by academic students in order to fulfill the assignment needs, work for theses and dissertation, and conduct a research project. Students are demanded to write academically or scientifically. To illustrate, students are required to pay attention to academic or scientific writing aspects such as the diction choice, tone, reader, or the assignment types (e.g. case study, reflective journal, literature review, essay, etc). A scientific evidence is also needed to support the writing. This scientific style tends to make the process of writing complex and trigger student's psychological or affective factors. It is also believed that affective factors can impact students' writing result. It can cause the way or process how the writing is carried out. One of the affective factors that have been a focus in numerous researches in second and foreign language writing is anxiety. Most people commonly assume that writing seems to be far less anxiety-provoking than the oral mode of communication as speaking since writing is often done under conditions that allow one more time to decide what to say and how to say it (Zabihi, 2017). Shortly, anxiety matter is

considered to be mostly happening in speaking skill among other English skills. However, not only in speaking skill, writing skill is also likely important to be further studied in terms of anxiety factor as both are productive skill. Many EFL learners still find writing difficult, frustrating, and even anxiety-producing. This factor refers to the indication of students to involve in writing activity or avoid it instead. According to Cheng (2004), the causes or reasons of students' writing anxiety can be interfered by (1). instructional writing practice, (2). personal belief about writing, (3). self-perceived competences, and (4). interpersonal threats. The negative and anxious feeling also may relate to their writing process as it potentially interferes their writing product. Zabihi (2017) continues that the low-anxious writer may perform writing well and fluently while the high-anxious writer shows the contrary. Furthermore, the researcher argues that the influence of anxiety in second and foreign language writing is concerned as an underrated writing problem since studies on speaking anxiety are more numerous than studies in writing anxiety.

There are actually several affective factors impacts student's writing process include motivation, attitude, personality, and anxiety. To fill the research gap, the

phenomenon of writing anxiety was investigated because the anxiety factor is regarded as an affective/psychological problem which happens to be underestimated case and rarely studied in the realm of academic or scientific writing. Thus, an attempt was required to explore the issue of EFL students' anxiety in writing the scientific paper. In this present study, the research is aimed to elaborate the reasons of writing anxiety happened among English department students of UIN Sumatera Utara.

2. METHOD

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2.1. Research Design

This research used qualitative research design. Cresswell (2012:16) states that qualitative research explores a problem and provides detailed understanding of a central phenomenon. Referring to this, the research conceives the data which is to be described and interpreted to get the larger meaning of the findings. The data of this research was the interview transcription which includes the reasons or factors why students experience writing anxiety. The source of the data was the 3rd year undergraduate English department students of UIN Sumatera Utara an academic year 2019/2020 who took Scientific Writing subject in the 7th semester. Among 200 English department students, 11 students were selected as the research participants by using snowball sampling technique. In qualitative research, snowball sampling is categorized as a non-probability sampling which is used to obtain and explore more information. According to Sugiyono (2016), snowball sampling is the sampling technique used to get the research data which initially has a few samples until the amount of samples are increased since the first sample is considered insufficient enough to give the data.

2.2. Instrument

The instrument used in the current study was interview. The interview was adapted from Miri (2018). The interview protocol was also used to obtain the clear data. The interview was in the form of semi- or partially structured type of interview, in which the area of interest is chosen and questions are formulated but the interviewer may modify the format or questions during the interview process. This semi-structured interview was aimed to answer the last research question which is to describe and provide detail explanation about the factors or reasons why students experienced writing anxiety.

3. RESULT & DISCUSSION

The reasons of writing anxiety data was obtained from a semi-structured interview. It was found out there are 7 reasons of writing anxiety as elaborated below:

3.1. Lack of Topic Interest

The students claimed they have a writing difficulty related to the assigned topics which trigger their anxiety as it does not fit their interest to write the paper. The interview data can be seen as follows:

"I thought the topic is free to choose but it is already assigned in the syllabus instead. It is difficult to determine the problem particularly in how the problem is delivered in the research and also the gap in it" (R1)

"..we feel restricted to write because it does not meet our topic interest. It is quite stressful when I write the literature review since it is difficult to strengthen the argument" (R2)

Those data obtain the proposition that the lack of topic interest initiates student's writing anxiety. It is further prescribed that when the writing topic is assigned, the students feel quite constrained to write the paper. This problem can inhibit student's desire to write. On the other hand, the student will tend to keep up with their paper in case they are in charge to write or decide the topic they are interested in. This finding corresponds to Cheng (2004) who categorizes Lack of Topic Interest as Instructional Practices. It also supports the study from Rezaei & Jafari (2014). They declare the Lack of Topic Interest is described as Problem's With Topic Choice which are placed as the 8th factor. Compared to the present study, Rezaei & Jafari's study have different result since it is conducted with mixed-method design which involves 120 respondents:

3.2. Teacher's Teaching Style

In this study, the teaching style of lecturer in instructing the scientific writing subject is also a matter for students in catching the points or understanding the explanations regarding to the rules, standard, or guide in writing the scientific paper. It gets the students stressful and anxious to run the writing process as stated in the following data:

"..it is way too fast. It makes me missed the information when I have to write something such as reference. I feel doubtful, afraid of being wrong, and panic so that I asked my senior related to this problem. I didn't know how." (R1)

"Well, the lecturer explains way too fast. It makes me afraid which in case I may write incorrectly so that I

have to do something I have never done before like recording her teaching process in the class.” (R2)

From the result of data above, the researcher acquires the proposition that the student’s anxiety in writing is influenced by the teacher’s teaching style. In this case, the students get misinformed to apprehend the materials since they clearly did not get time to process the scientific writing instructions and input from the lecture. Yet, Teacher’s Teaching Style is unnoticed in any other writing anxiety studies. In this present study, this reason may be regarded as the new finding since the teaching style, which potentially impacts students’ anxiety in composing English writing, is rarely considered as a crucial problem in other research focuses.

3.3. Plagiarism Threat

Plagiarism threat is evidently denounced as the reason why students’ anxiety was triggered in writing the paper. It can be seen in the following data:

“The first thing that makes me anxious is we are warned to plagiarize because there is punishment for doing it. If we get caught plagiarizing, the lecturer will mark us E immediately. No more A, B, or C” (R1)

“I feel that I am going anxious as anything I write must be avoided from plagiarism. We are banned earlier not to plagiarize, even paraphrasing is also complicated to do because it is very difficult.” (R2)

The data above draw the proposition that the students’ writing anxiety is resulted from the plagiarism threat. It can be also implied that, by considering and anticipating the plagiarism, the student was incapable to write unimpededly. The impact of this problem relies on the paraphrasing skill, which is the act to hinder the plagiarism in writing the scientific paper. However, this reason is not corresponding with other works in any writing anxiety studies:

3.4. High Amount of Assignments

High amount of assignments were in fact a student’s problem in writing the scientific paper. It makes the student stressful, which is pointed as the indication of writing anxiety. It is proven from the data as follows:

“I feel so exhausted. Another assignments are still unfinished so that I find myself blank and stressful to start the writing. This also makes me ignore to write the paper. So far I haven’t even had the title to write about.” (R1)

“Yesterday I did not check this assignment anymore because I was doing another ones such as writing the proposal, PPL report, and recitation. When I started to

write, I am afraid and doubtful to continue writing the journal since I got stuck.” (R2)

Furthermore, those data attain the proposition that high amount of assignments causes students to have writing anxiety. This also further explains that the high amount of assignments can reduce the amount of time the students could spend to write the paper. Therefore, the students are not be able to concentrate well since another assignments get them overwhelmed to proceed and finish the scientific writing. The factor of High Amount of Assignments is consistent with the finding from Rezaei & Jafari (2014). In their study, this factor is occurred to Iranian EFL students in advanced writing course.

3.5. Grammar and Vocabulary Insecurity

The factor of grammar and vocabulary stressed the students out in writing the paper. To illustrate, the data can be viewed as follows:

“I am anxious in the grammar, so I am afraid if I write it incorrectly. The tenses are different. When I want to write it in present, sometimes the sentence is past tense, which confuses me. Sometimes the vocabulary is past tense, but we write it in present tense.” (R1)

“As I told just now, I am afraid if my grammar is incorrect as I am still lack of it. I must pay attention to the tenses. Scientific writing is difficult so that I cannot just write carelessly. It is also hard to write the formal and different vocabulary since it is not allowed to write the regular ones.” (R2)

The proposition is portrayed that the grammar and vocabulary insecurity impacts student’s anxiety. It appoints that due to the grammatical and vocabulary problems, it gains student’s psychological problems such as anxiety and insecurity to keep up with the writing. In addition, student’s anxiety in writing scientifically can be resulted from the grammar and vocabulary competence they have. Furthermore, this finding corresponds to the study from Kusumaningputri, Ningsih & Wisasongko (2018). They describe that Linguistic Difficulties, which deals with grammar, structure, lack of vocabulary, syntactic complexity, semantic area, can worry the participants and result more anxiety experiences.

3.6. Pressure of Perfect Writing

In this study, the students tend to take a long process to write their scientific composition because of being worried of mistakes. Thus, the student carried ways out to anticipate them as viewed in the data as follows:

"I often take a long time to think when I write. I think so many times just to check if my writing is incorrect or not. I feel annoyed if I make mistakes in my writing because I just want to write properly." (R1)

"Honestly, there is a feeling which I have to avoid the mistake as best as possible. Because a little mistake will burden me thinking of it. I want to write better so that I think long when I write. But I just do it the best as I can, as long as it is not done recklessly." (R2)

In accordance with those data, it generates the proposition that the phenomenon of perfectionism in writing tend to trigger student's anxiety. It infers that the lack of satisfaction in writing brings the students insecurity to a failure regarding to their work. As a result, the writing process tend to be time-consuming for the students just to write the better composition. This finding also supports the previous work from Rezaei & Jafari (2014). Their study reveals that the Pressure of Perfect Work is placed as the fifth cause among 10 sources of writing anxiety of Iranian EFL students.

3.7. Lack of Practice

The factor of going blank in writing is categorized as the reason of writing anxiety since the students are incapable to think clearly and pour the ideas effectively. Furthermore, this problem also gets them insecure in case their writing is not good enough. Nonetheless, the lack of practice problem is reported as the cause of student's writing anxiety. It can be seen from the following data:

"Because of lack of practice. So I often feel blank to write, no ideas. My thoughts were going blank. Because there was a time I had just written one paragraph, then I left it. When I rechecked my writing, I am suddenly blank and confused for what I have written, 'What is this? Why do I forget this?' oh my God I feel embarrassed." (R1)

"Honestly it is my mistake and bad habit since I never want to practice my writing skill more often. It makes me difficult to write, afraid of making a wrong writing, stuck of ideas. I rarely practice so that when I have to compose this kind of writing, I feel so incapable of doing it." (R2)

In relation to those data, it obtains the proposition that the writing anxiety is triggered from the lack of practice. According to this, the lack of practice has to do with the writing habit the students have such as the writing procrastination. This matter also drives the student's fear and gets the student blank of ideas as they were going confused to continue writing the paper. This finding is consistent with the study from Kusumaningputri, Ningsih & Wisasongko (2018) who

find out that Insufficient Writing Practice is revealed as the primary causal factor of writing anxiety occurred in sophomore students.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The causal factors that trigger students' writing anxiety in writing the scientific paper are resulted from Lack of Topic Interest, Teacher's Teaching Style, High Amount of Assignments, Plagiarism Threat, Grammar and Vocabulary Insecurity, Pressure of Perfect Writing, and Lack of Practice. In this study, Teacher's Teaching Style, Plagiarism Threat, High Amount of Assignments, and Lack of Practice are reported as a different finding. This finding implies that all of these reasons of writing anxiety may occur because the students have no prior or initial practice and knowledge to get themselves accustomed and understood to write a paper scientifically. This also suggests students need to be well-trained about composing a scientific paper properly in order to minimize the writing anxiety experience.

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