



## EXPLORING ANXIETY AND SELF-EFFICACY IN WRITING: A CASE OF AN ENGLISH PREPARATORY PROGRAM

SELEN GÖNCÜ

*Babçesebir University*  
selengnc.sg@gmail.com

ENISA MEDE 

*Babçesebir University*  
enisa.mede@es.bau.edu.tr

*ABSTRACT.* This paper investigates the level and type of writing anxiety among Turkish EFL students along with the causes of the anxiety perceived by them and their instructors. The EFL writing self-efficacy level of the students was examined, and with the findings obtained, the relationship between writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy in EFL classes was investigated. To meet these objectives, 176 (A2, intermediate level) Turkish EFL students and 6 instructors enrolled in a language preparatory program offered by a state university in Istanbul, Turkey participated in the study. The data were gathered both quantitative and qualitatively through the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), Self-efficacy in Writing Scale (SWS), Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory (CWAI), and semi-structured interviews. The results revealed that the students had either a high or moderate level of writing anxiety in English, and they mostly suffered from cognitive anxiety. Their level of writing self-efficacy was also moderate, and there was a negative correlation between self-efficacy and writing anxiety among the participants. The results of this study suggest implications about coping with anxiety and self-efficacy in writing classes at language preparatory programs.

*Keywords:* Language Skills, Writing, Writing Anxiety, Writing Self-Efficacy, Causes of Anxiety, EFL Learners.

## EXPLORANDO LA ANSIEDAD Y LA AUTOEFICACIA EN LA PRODUCCIÓN ESCRITA: ESTUDIO DE CASO DE UN PROGRAMA DE PREPARATORIA DE INGLÉS

*RESUMEN.* Este artículo investiga el nivel y tipo de ansiedad que desarrollan los estudiantes turcos de ILE y cuáles son las causas que perciben los propios estudiantes y sus instructores. Además, se examina la autoeficacia de los estudiantes de ILE en la producción escrita, y con estos resultados se establece y se investiga la relación entre la ansiedad y la autoeficacia que surge ante la escritura en las clases de ILE. En el estudio han participado 176 estudiantes turcos de ILE de nivel pre-intermedio (A2, nivel intermedio) matriculados en un programa de preparación de idioma ofertado por la universidad pública de Estambul y 6 instructores. Los datos han sido recogidos tanto cuantitativamente como cualitativamente usando the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), Self-efficacy in Writing Scale (SWS), Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory (CWAI), y entrevistas semiestructuradas. Los resultados han revelado que los estudiantes sufren una ansiedad alta o moderada cuando se enfrentan a la producción escrita en inglés, y la mayoría sufre ansiedad cognitiva. Su nivel de autoeficacia es también moderado, y se da una correlación negativa entre la autoeficacia y la ansiedad. Estos resultados sugieren implicaciones relativas a cómo hacer frente a la ansiedad y la autoeficacia durante las clases de producción escrita de los programas de preparación de idioma.

*Palabras clave:* destrezas lingüísticas, escritura, ansiedad ante la escritura, autoeficacia ante la escritura, causas de la ansiedad, estudiantes de ILE.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Learning a new language is a complex process that can get affected by several aspects such as cognitive, metacognitive, demographic, and affective factors (Brown 1973; Sparks and Ganschow 1996; Olivares-Cuhat 2010; Arnold 2011). Owing to their crucial role in learning, affective factors can be influential during the process of language learning. Anxiety, as one of the affective factors, can affect the course of language learning, thus this phenomenon should be defined and explained in detail (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986). Anxiety is an emotional and subjective feeling of tension that has an important role in learning a language (Ellis 2006) and it is one of the notions, which makes the process of language learning challenging (Guzel and Aydin 2014; Subasi 2010; Han, Tanriover, and Sahar 2016; Zhang and Rahimi 2014). Essentially, while some learners might tend to experience apprehension in any language class, some might be vulnerable to suffer from apprehension in a condition that requires the use of a specific language skill mainly (Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert 1999). At that point, it is possible to mention the skill-specific, writing foreign language anxiety which originated from Daly and Miller's (1975) as the situation of being prone to stay away from the writing process specifically if the writing is supposed to be evaluated. In its recent definition, writing anxiety means distressing and damaging emotions (related to the learners

themselves as writers, the situation which requires writing, or the writing activity) which hinder the flow of the writing process (Rankin-Brown 2006).

Self-efficacy is another affective variable that has an impact on learning developing writing skills and writing performance. Self-efficacy is defined as self-efficacy as beliefs in one's ability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura 1994: 71). Many distinguished scholars indicated that language learners who possess a higher level of writing self-efficacy can show a better performance in writing with a lower level of writing anxiety in contrast to ones with low-level writing self-efficacy (Bruning and Horn 2000; Pajares 2003; Pajares and Cheong 2003; Pajares and Johnson 1994; Pajares and Valiante 1997; 2006).

As mentioned above, anxiety and self-efficacy are critical affective factors in the writing process. To get a clearer understanding of these affective factors, it is essential to determine writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy levels of language learners and, identify the perceived reasons which cause such anxiety.

## 2. AFFECTIVE FACTORS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Language learning is closely related to human psychology, affect, and the social factors which shape the way they perceive the language itself and the process of learning. The first attempts to explain the effects of "affect" on language learning were in the late 1950s and 1960s presented by Gardner and Lambert (1972) at McGill University as Schumann (1975) reported in his study. Hilgard (1963) declared that approaching the issue of learning with cognitive theories entirely should be abandoned if the role of affectivity is not regarded. Cognition and affect should not be considered separately. Examining the concepts related to the personality of humans is a key to find out solutions for difficult situations in language learning.

Anxiety is one of the affective variables which can influence the learning process, especially in foreign language learning (Na 2007). It was defined by some psychologists as an apprehensive state of mind, an obscure worry which is incidentally linked to a matter (Hilgard *et al.* 1971). Spielberg and Barratt (1972) remarked that anxiety is the displeasing stress which can be discerned consciously and the apprehension activating and triggering the autonomic nervous system. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) tried to explain the development of anxiety and they stated that students with high-level anxiety are also exposed to the consequences of their negative apprehensive feelings along with the hardship of the task requirements which makes the process much more difficult for them. Their performance on a task can be damaged by their negative self-perception, and thus their anxiety level goes up.

Self-efficacy is another factor that can be considered as a powerful indicator of achievement in the learning process of writing skills. Bandura (1994) argued that self-efficacy is the presumptions of individuals related to their success in fulfilling a task that can influence their lives. Additionally, self-efficacy has been proven to be

associated with anxiety in language learning. Studies have indicated that language learners who possess a higher level of writing self-efficacy can show a better performance in writing with a lower level of writing anxiety in contrast to ones with low-level low writing self-efficacy (McCarthy *et al.* 1985; Pajares and Valiante 2006). Hence, this study aims to shed light on the relationship between anxiety and self-efficacy in writing.

Writing skills can be more challenging for a foreign language learner because writing in a foreign language requires creative thinking, sufficient knowledge of language mechanics, and some other important abilities which are cognitively demanding (MacIntyre and Cardner 1994).

### 2.1. WRITING ANXIETY

Bloom (1985) defined writing anxiety as “a label for one or a combination of feelings, beliefs, or behaviors that interfere with a person’s ability to start, work on, or finish a given writing task that he or she is intellectually capable of doing” (p. 12). He emphasized the hindrance against a good performance in completing a writing task caused by the negative feelings despite the writer’s intellectual capability to complete the task. Writing anxiety can reveal itself both in the form of an attitude arising in time and for a specific situation while completing a particular writing task (Riffe and Stacks 1992). Hassan (2001) supported that experiencing anxiety while writing in a foreign language is situational.

Cheng (2004a) offered three main types of anxiety which are somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, and avoidance behavior. It can be claimed that cognitive anxiety is connected to the reflection of anxiety on cognition along with pessimistic assumptions and concern about the performance and the ideas of other people. It was highlighted that cognitive factors are the main determiners of the relationship between anxiety and writing performance in the target language while somatic or behavioral factors cannot have a more powerful impact on this issue. In addition, recent studies (*e.g.* Blasco 2016; Ekmekçi 2018; Kara 2013; Khelalfa 2018; Kusumaningputri *et al.* 2018; Rezaei and Jafari 2014; Jebreil, Azizifar and Gowhary 2015; Kırmızı 2015) accepted cognitive anxiety as the most powerful one compared to other two subtypes of anxiety namely somatic anxiety and avoidance behavior. On the other hand, somatic anxiety was associated with the perception of the individuals on the psychological impact of anxiety which can arise when negative feelings such as stress and apprehension were experienced.

### 2.2. THE CAUSES OF WRITING ANXIETY

The studies investigating the causes of writing anxiety found out various reasons triggering and increasing anxiety in EFL writing. In the study conducted by Lin and Ho (2009) negative evaluation of the teacher and getting bad grades were the main causes of writing anxiety. Zhang (2011) asserted that test-taking, poor self-

confidence in writing, given topic for the writing task, insufficient linguistic competence, and time limitation were anxiety triggering factors in writing. Moreover, the findings of the study of Erkan and Saban (2011) pointed out that the reason why the learners hesitate to deal with writing tasks is mostly related to their lack of language skills. Kara (2013) emphasized that the reasons may arise from the concept of writing, writing as a language skill, instructors, and course books. It was noted that writing anxiety is another version of test-taking anxiety caused by insufficient experience in writing. The students tend to think that they would fail, and they were anxious because they had insufficient experience in writing while they were experienced in test-taking throughout their previous education life.

Rezaei and Jafari (2014) created a brand-new scale, the Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory (CWAI), and it was applied to 120 Iranian EFL learners. The most outstanding causes detected in the study were insufficient competence in the target language, lack of self-esteem in writing, the fear of negative evaluation of teachers about the writing production. As one of the recent studies on the issue, Kırmızı and Kırmızı (2015) detected that the most serious cause was time pressure for writing anxiety. Secondly, the negative evaluation of the teacher was one of the reasons. Next, insufficient writing practice in English, the feeling of stress caused by perfect writing expectations, the number and frequency of given writing assignments, problems about topic choice, low self-esteem, the concerns about exams were the other influential causes of writing anxiety in order. In the study of Liu and Ni (2015), the interviews with EFL students revealed the difficulty of writing in another language, the efforts to write properly, their concerns about the results of the exams, lack of vocabulary knowledge, insufficient practice in writing, encountering with unfamiliar genres for the writing task, being slow were the identified causes for writing anxiety. Cone (2016) argued that writing anxiety may be influenced by a variety of social and academic factors such as class grades, paper deadlines, fear of failure, life or social issues. Finally, in a recent study, Sabti, Rashid, Nimehchisalem, and Darmi (2019) revealed that higher writing anxiety led to poorer writing performance among language learners.

### 2.3. WRITING SELF-EFFICACY

The first introduction of the concept of self-efficacy was made in the social cognitive theory by Bandura (1986) and later explained by Bandura (1994) as the awareness of a person related to their skills to be able to complete a specific level task. The psychologists Heslin and Klehe (2006) also defined the term self-efficacy as the major individual factor which has a profound impact on the performance of the person in task achievement by supporting the skills of organization and strategy use. Jones (2008) described self-efficacy as having self-esteem related to the capacity to complete a given task successfully and acting by using required abilities. Self-efficacy also influences the capacity of the learners to be successful at reaching their goals both in their daily life and academic work.

Writing self-efficacy can be defined as the beliefs related to writing abilities (Bandura 1986: p. 94). If a person feels confident about their writing skills, it is the indicator of a high level of writing self-efficacy. Pajares and Johnson (1994) asserted that writing self-efficacy is the understanding of the learners regarding their writing competence including the ability to fulfill a variety of writing tasks, using language appropriately, knowing about the mechanics of writing, and composing skills for different tasks. Lavelle (2006) emphasized that writing self-efficacy motivates language learners in terms of problem-solving when they encounter hard writing tasks. Several research studies unveiled that writing self-efficacy can determine the performance in writing skills (Pajares and Johnson 1994; Sabti *et al.* 2019; Shah, Mahmud, Din, Yusof and Pardi 2011; Shehzadi and Krishnasamy 2018). Pajares and Johnson (1994) pointed out the important predictive role of writing self-efficacy on writing performance not only at the end but also at the beginning of the term. In recent studies, Sabti *et al.* (2019) and Shah *et al.* (2011) reported that the correlation between self-efficacy and writing performance was significantly positive. Moreover, the apprehension related to writing, absence of self-esteem in writing skills, reluctance to write lead to be less proficient at writing tasks (Pajares 2003). In brief, the writing production is influenced profoundly by the writing self-efficacy of individuals (Shehzadi and Krishnasamy 2018). This study, therefore, attempts to address the concepts of writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy along with the perceived causes to provide implications about creating a non-threatening and positive learning environment in EFL classrooms.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

#### 3.1. OBJECTIVES

The present study aims to investigate the levels of writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy among Turkish EFL learners and examine if there is any relationship between the two affective factors. The study also seeks to find out the perceptions of students and their instructors related to the causes of anxiety in English writing classes. To meet these objectives, the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1: What is the level of writing anxiety of Turkish EFL learners?

RQ2: What type of writing anxiety do the Turkish EFL learners experience in their writing courses?

RQ3: What is the level of writing self-efficacy of the participants?

RQ4: Is there a significant relationship between writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy?

RQ5: What are the perceptions of the language learners about the causes of writing anxiety in English classes?

RQ6: What are the perceptions of the instructors about the causes of writing anxiety in their English classes?

### *3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN*

For this study, a mixed-methods research design was used to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data. Creswell (2003: 6) highlighted the benefit of utilizing mixed research methods by stating that “well-validated and substantiated findings” can be gathered by using both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools. In this research, the administration of the questionnaires was followed up with the interviews conducted with the students and their instructors.

### *3.3. CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS*

This study was conducted at an English language preparatory school of a state university in Istanbul, Turkey. The participants were native Turkish speakers learning English as a second language whose ages ranged between 18 to 20 years old. They had to improve their language skills to follow their undergraduate course in various disciplines such as Engineering and Architecture

At the beginning of the academic year, the prospective students took a local standardized placement test designed by the Testing Office which is based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) international language standards. Based on the exam scores, the classes were arranged in two groups, B1 (pre-intermediate) and A2 (elementary) levels. The sample of this study was selected from 176 A2 level students (89 male, 87 female) as it was the primary level the preparatory students were engaged in. Specifically, the reason for choosing this level was to detect the writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy levels as well as identify the possible causes behind these tendencies before moving to the upper level of proficiency.

Apart from the preparatory students, 6 EFL instructors (2 male, 4 female) offering writing courses participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 25 to 29 years old, and they had 2 years of experience in the preparatory program.

### *3.4. INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURES*

To meet the objectives of the study, both quantitative and qualitative measures were administered to the participants. As quantitative data collection instruments, The Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) by Cheng (2004b), The Causes of Writing Anxiety (CWAI) by Rezaei and Jafari (2014), and Self-Efficacy in Writing Scale (SWS) by Yavuz-Erkan (2004) were used in this study as they were appropriate measures for the context and sample of this research. The three instruments were administered in English by the researchers who helped the participants by orally simplifying the wording of the items that might be difficult to comprehend.

Considering the learners' level of writing anxiety, the method suggested by Cheng (2004b) was implemented for each writing anxiety level. According to this

categorization, if a participant gets a score below 50 points, it means that she or he has a low level of writing anxiety. The score for a moderate level of writing anxiety is considered between 50 and 65 while the participant has a high level of writing anxiety in English if this score is more than 65. Subsequently, this result was supported by the analysis of the number of students in terms of each level of writing self-efficacy which is displayed in Figure 2 below. To determine the range scores of each level, the detection of the categories was adapted from the study of Kırmızı and Kırmızı (2015), and the cut-off points were calculated by dividing the maximum point which is 140 in total into three to be able to put the students under certain categories as low, medium, and high level of writing self-efficacy.

Apart from the quantitative data, the qualitative data were gathered from semi-structured interviews. Four questions attempted to obtain further information on the perceptions of students on writing skills, their attitudes towards the writing process, their experiences referring to writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy, and lastly, the possible causes of this anxiety. Parallel to the student interviews, the EFL instructors were asked three questions that aimed to find out their perceptions about their experiences of writing anxiety in their classrooms.

#### 4. RESULTS

##### 4.1. THE LEVEL OF WRITING ANXIETY AMONG ENGLISH LEARNERS

To answer the first research question regarding the level of writing anxiety among A2 level English preparatory students, the data were obtained via SLWAI administered to 176 participants. To this end, the total writing anxiety scores were calculated regarding students' ratings to the scale. As reported in Table 1, the maximum score received by the participants was 110 while the minimum score was 25. The mean score of the participants was 66.73 which refers to a “moderate to a high level of writing anxiety” among the participants.

Table 1. Overview of the Descriptive Statistics of the SLWAI.

	<b>M</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>SD</b>
Writing Anxiety	<b>66.73</b>	25	110	17.53

Further, according to the results, 30 participants had a low level of writing anxiety as their mean score was below 50. Moreover, 55 students whose mean score was between 50 and 65 had moderate anxiety, while 91 students got a mean score higher than 60 indicating a high level of writing anxiety. In other words, most of the participants (52%) suffered from a high level of writing anxiety while 31% had a moderate level of writing anxiety. Finally, only 17% of participants experienced a low level of writing anxiety in their courses (See Table 2). Based on the categorization of Cheng (2004b), it can be concluded that more than half of the



language learners experienced a high level of writing anxiety in the existing program.

Table 2. The descriptive statistics about the levels of writing anxiety among learners.

Level	N	%	Min.	Max.	SD	M
High	91	52	65	110	5.86	80.46 ≥ 65
Moderate	55	31	50	64	4.68	57.14 ≤ 65
Low	30	17	25	49	11.58	42.7 ≤ 65
<b>Total</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>100</b>				

#### 4.2. THE TYPE OF WRITING ANXIETY AMONG LANGUAGE LEARNERS

To find out the type of writing anxiety experienced by the participants of the study, SLWAI composed of three subtypes of writing anxiety categorized as cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior was analyzed by calculating the ratings of the students for the related items for each subtype. To determine the number of participants who experience cognitive anxiety, which refers to the mental situation triggered by fear and apprehension, related questionnaire items (1, 3, 7, 9, 14, 17, 20, and 21) were analyzed together. The same steps were followed for somatic anxiety which is related to negative impacts of anxiety on physiology by analyzing the related items (2, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15, and 19). Finally, the level of avoidance behavior, which can be defined as abstaining from foreign language writing, the related items (4, 5, 10, 12, 16, 18, and 22) were analyzed. The mean scores of each type of writing anxiety are presented in Figure 1.

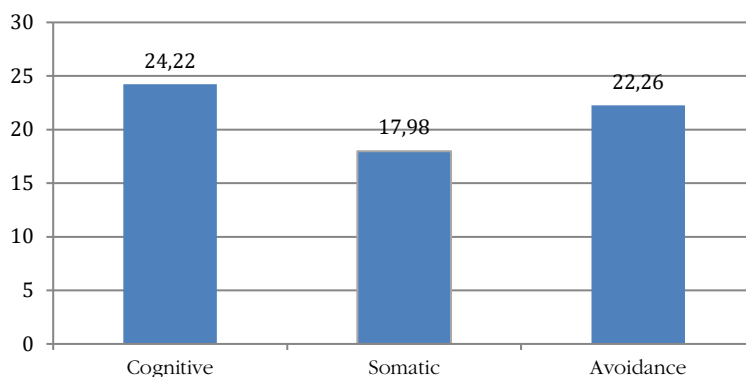


Figure 1. The mean scores of the writing anxiety types among learners.

As displayed in Figure 1, cognitive anxiety had the highest mean score ( $M=24.22$ ) compared to the other types of writing anxiety. This finding showed that Cognitive Anxiety was the most common writing anxiety type experienced by the EFL students who took part in the study. In addition, according to these results, the second

prevalent type of writing anxiety was Avoidance Behavior ( $M=22.26$ ) while the least common type of writing anxiety was Somatic Anxiety experienced by the participating students ( $M=17.98$ ).

Additionally, the results revealed that the great majority of learners faced writing anxiety ranging from medium to high level for each sub-type. Specifically, the highest levels for each type were as follows: cognitive anxiety, 69 (39.20%); somatic anxiety, 30 (17%); and avoidance behavior 70 (39.70%).

Table 3. The number of learners for each level of writing anxiety.

Type of Writing anxiety	Low		Moderate		High	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Cognitive Anxiety	11	6.25	96	54.54	69	<b>39.20</b>
Somatic Anxiety	27	15.30	118	67	30	<b>17</b>
Avoidance Behavior	6	3.40	100	56.80	70	<b>39.70</b>

#### 4.3. THE LEVEL OF WRITING SELF-EFFICACY AMONG LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The third research question attempted to investigate the level of writing self-efficacy of language learners. Provided in Table 4, the mean score for SWS among 176 participants was found as 87.67. The lowest and highest scores were recorded as 28 and 140 respectively. In addition, the standard deviation for the writing self-efficacy scores of the participants was recorded as 21.13. This finding demonstrates that most of the students tend to have moderate or high levels of writing self-efficacy in English.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of SWS.

	Mean	Min	Max	SD
Writing Self-efficacy	<b>87.67</b>	28	140	21.23

According to the findings obtained, the participants who got a score between 93 and 140 had a high level of EFL writing self-efficacy. On the contrary, if they scored less than 45, they experienced a low level of writing self-efficacy in English. The ones with a score between 46 and 92 can be stated as the language learners with a moderate level of writing self-efficacy in English. As demonstrated in Figure 2, 71 participants experienced a high level of writing self-efficacy while only 5 had a low level of writing self-efficacy. Largely, most of the participants (97) were at a moderate level of writing self-efficacy in English.

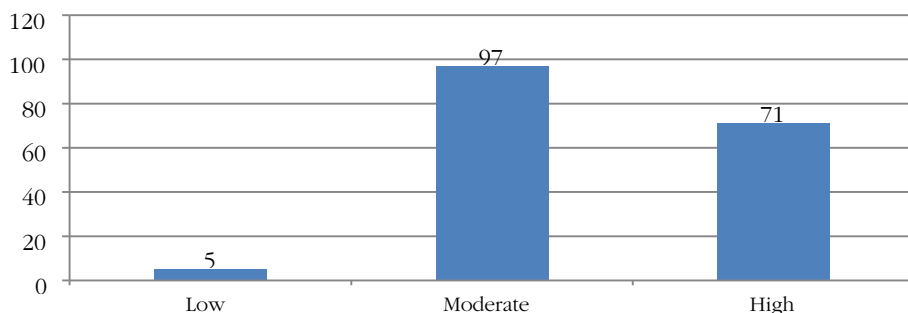


Figure 2. The frequency of each level of writing self-efficacy.

#### 4.4. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WRITING ANXIETY AND WRITING SELF-EFFICACY

The fourth research question attempted to ascertain the relationship between anxiety and self-efficacy as two crucial affective variables in writing skills in the context of the current study. To analyze the data and find out whether there was any relationship between the level of EFL writing anxiety and EFL writing self-efficacy, the Pearson correlation results showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy ( $p < 0.01$ ). Specifically, the value  $r = -0.637$  is an indicator of a significant moderate level inverse correlation between writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy (See Table 5). These findings indicated that the learners with a low level of writing self-efficacy tend to experience a higher level of writing anxiety in English.

Table 5. The relationship between writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy

		Writing Anxiety	Writing Self-efficacy
Writing Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	-.637**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		176
Writing Self-efficacy	Pearson Correlation	-.637**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	176	

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

#### 4.5. THE PERCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE LEARNERS ABOUT THE CAUSES OF WRITING ANXIETY

To answer the fifth research question about the perceptions of language learners about the causes of writing anxiety in English classes, both quantitative (Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) data collection instruments were administered on the students who participated in this study. First, the CWAI was analyzed by using descriptive statistics (see Figure 3).

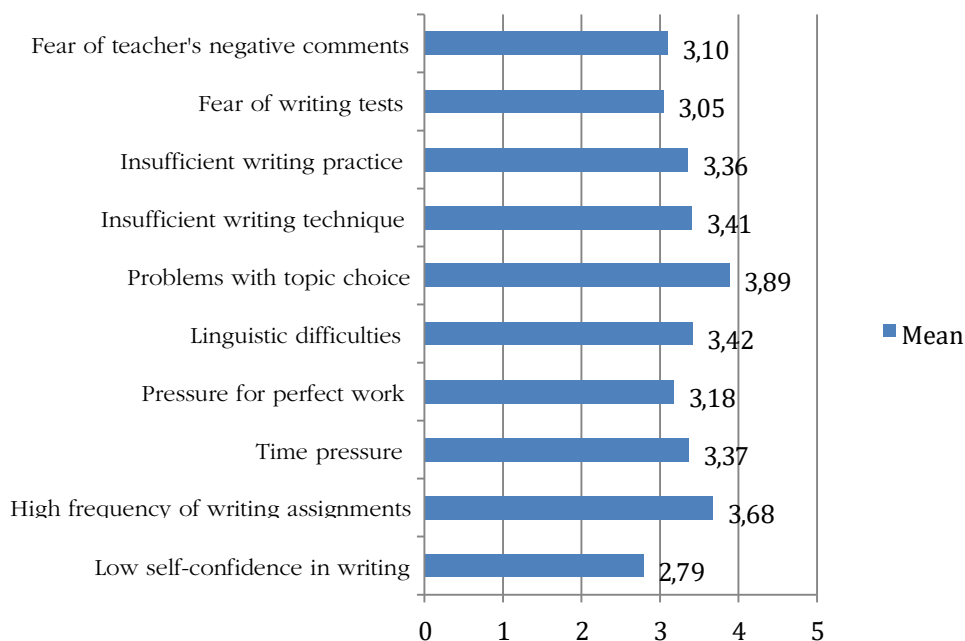


Figure 3. Descriptive statistics of CWAI.

The results in Figure 3 illustrated that the main factor causing writing anxiety was “problems with topic choice” with the highest mean score ( $M=3.89$ ) among 10 possible causes perceived by language learners. This finding showed that the students experienced apprehension when they had a problem with the topic of the assigned writing. The high frequency of writing assignments ( $M=3.68$ ), linguistic difficulties ( $M=3.42$ ), insufficient writing technique ( $M=3.41$ ), and time pressure ( $M=3.37$ ) were perceived as the secondary factors causing writing anxiety among learners. Finally, the least scored causal factor was “low confidence in writing” ( $M=2.79$ ) revealing that most of the participants had a moderate level of writing self-efficacy.

Apart from the questionnaire, the interviews revealed parallel findings of the causes of writing anxiety in English classes. When the participants were asked about their opinion related to the most difficult of language skills for them compared to other language skills, 5 out of 20 participants mentioned writing skill and the challenging aspects of this skill such as the difficulty of production in English, giving the effort to write, and length of time to produce while writing in English. They described writing in English as “difficult, boring, and time taking”. The other adjectives that the students reported were “long, tiring, terrible, stressful, thrilling, and complicated”. In addition, they expressed their viewpoints about the difficulties that they experience while writing in English. Most of the respondents claimed that

the major problem was language use, specifically insufficient vocabulary knowledge, the content of the writing task, language use, and time management.

Finally, during the interviews, the learners also shared there are various reasons for writing anxiety. To begin with, the respondents claimed that the biggest reason for the anxiety experienced in writing was a time constraint for the writing assignments and writing exams. They reported that the grading of the teacher was the second major reason. Compared to the results of CWAI, they shared that the pressure caused by teacher grading or comments, unfamiliar topics, and lack of vocabulary knowledge influenced their emotional state.

#### *4.6. THE PERCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS ABOUT THE CAUSES OF WRITING ANXIETY*

To gain a deeper understanding of the causes of writing anxiety, 6 instructors offering writing classes were interviewed as well. The first question addressed aimed at revealing the perceptions of the instructors about the anxiety in four language skills. The respondents agreed on two language skills as the most challenging skills for the students: writing and speaking. Concerning the writing skill, instructors mentioned the difficulty students experience while generating ideas for the content of the writing task, insufficient linguistic competence, and previous negative experiences related to writing in English.

Poor linguistic competence was perceived as another cause of writing anxiety. The instructors also emphasized that when the time was limited for the learners to write in the target language, they felt anxious. The teacher feedback and insufficient input were also related to the existence and level of writing anxiety. Finally, the instructors shared that lack of motivation, time management, negative attitudes, feelings, previous experiences, inability to organize writing were crucial difficulties that led to writing anxiety among the learners.

In brief, both groups of participants shared common difficulties related to language (e.g. linguistic competence) and management (e.g. time and organization) as effective causes of writing anxiety. The only difference between the perceptions of the two groups was about the content of writing tasks. While the learners expressed difficulties to cope with the content of the writing task, the instructors did not refer to any problems related to the topic or content of the writing task.

## 5. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

This research aims to investigate the levels of writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy among Turkish EFL learners and find out if any relationship exists between the two affective factors. The study also reveals the perceptions of the language learners and their instructors about their experience related to the causes of writing anxiety in English courses.

The findings of SLWAI demonstrated that the great majority of language learners experienced a high level of writing anxiety whilst some of them had a moderate

level of anxiety in English writing classes. This finding is in line with previous studies (Atay and Kurt 2006, Erkan and Saban 2011, Rezaei and Jafari 2014; Kırmızı and Kırmızı 2015; Genc 2017) highlighting the importance of dealing with writing anxiety in English classes to help language learners improve their writing skills and promote their writing performance.

Considering the context of the present study, the language proficiency level of the participants (pre-intermediate, A2 level) can be regarded as a variable affecting the level of writing anxiety among learners. Similar studies supported this finding arguing that the language proficiency level of the language learners can increase or decrease the writing anxiety level of the learners (MacIntyre and Gardner 1991; Cheng 2002; Jebreil *et al.* 2014). However, it should be noted that there can be different challenges for different language proficiency levels in terms of writing skills which should be addressed further in comparative studies.

Apart from the writing anxiety level of language learners, the most common type of writing anxiety experienced by them was cognitive anxiety, compared to somatic anxiety and avoidance behavior. The highly anxious EFL learners suffered from cognitive anxiety and avoidance behavior. Similarly, recent studies indicated that cognitive anxiety is the most common type of writing anxiety among language learners (Cheng 2004a; Zhang 2011; Ateş 2013; Kara 2013; Rezaei and Jafari 2014; Jebreil *et al.* 2014; Kırmızı and Kırmızı 2015; Kusumaningputri, Ningsih and Wisasongko 2018). As previously stated, cognitive anxiety refers that the learners paying too much attention to the factors that externally affect their mental state while learning writing skills (Cheng, 2004a). These factors can increase the anxiety caused by the negative evaluation of the instructors, concern about peers' perception of their writing performance, test-related anxiety, the expectations or negative experiences of the learners about their writing performance. This means that the learners who experience cognitive anxiety get easily affected by external factors. Research also stated that students with a high level of cognitive anxiety in writing suffer from concentration problems when they are dealing with a writing task. As stressed by Kusumaningputri *et al.* (2018), learners should train themselves to keep control of their minds in order not to get distracted and to be able to lessen their writing anxiety level. The findings of this study offer similar suggestions related to raising the awareness of language learners about how they can control their feelings to help them decrease their anxiety while writing.

Besides cognitive anxiety, avoidance behavior was another major problem encountered among language learners with a high level of writing anxiety as the findings pointed out. The reason why highly anxious learners also showed avoidance behavior was that they tend to avoid situations requiring writing not to feel apprehensive (Cheng 2004a). This type of writing anxiety can lead to bigger problems by causing a lack of practice in writing skills, incomplete, late, or undelivered assignments.

Furthermore, in this study, over half of the participants claimed that they had a moderate level of writing self-efficacy whereas less than a half that they had a high

level of writing self-efficacy. These results reflected that most learners believed that they could fulfill the requirements of writing in the target language. Strikingly, just a few of them stated that their writing self-efficacy level in English was low. This result was consistent with the results by Kırmızı and Kırmızı (2015) revealing that the great majority of the students had moderate level writing self-efficacy in the English language as it was found in the present research study.

Apart from the writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy levels among the language learners, a moderate level, a negative correlation was found between writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy. This means that learners with moderate or low levels of writing self-efficacy suffered from moderate or high levels of writing anxiety. As one of the earliest studies, Pajares and Valiante (1997) highlighted that the impact of beliefs regarding self-efficacy anticipates the performance in writing which influences the writing apprehension level of the learners directly. It was also suggested that writing anxiety can be lessened by a high level of writing self-efficacy if the learning atmosphere is convenient (Cheng 2002). Further, another correlational study by Öztürk and Saydam (2014) asserted that these variables may have a causal relationship rather than a correlational relationship which ought to be inspected statistically in detail via further research studies. Thus, the aim of the language instructors should be to find ways to increase the writing self-efficacy of EFL learners to decrease the level of writing anxiety and avoid the negative effects of this anxiety on language learning.

Considering the results of the CWAI, the major causes of the anxiety experienced by the learners were problems with the topic choice, frequently given writing assignments, and linguistic difficulties. Additionally, the analysis of the interviews demonstrated that the learners had negative feelings and attitudes towards writing, and they mainly had difficulty in content, language use, and time management while writing in the target language. As previously suggested by Abdel-Latif (2007) the reasons leading to writing anxiety were mostly related to language and management issues. These are low level of language proficiency, lack of self-confidence, failures in writing tasks, lack of writing self-efficacy, insecurities about being assessed and evaluated. Surprisingly, in the present study, the students did not choose lack of self-confidence as the most influential source of writing anxiety in writing. Further, Magogwe (2015) supported that idea by emphasizing the role of self-efficacy in L1 writing supporting that L1 writing self-efficacy should be closely addressed as a precursor of writing self-efficacy. In their study, Rezaei and Jafari (2014) also found that language learners had a moderate or low level of writing self-efficacy in English, and they associated it with low motivation, writing instruction, teachers' feedback, low level of language proficiency, and L1 interference. Moreover, competence in writing, the attitude, and feedback of the instructor were found to have an impact on writing self-efficacy (Nazzal 2008; Öztürk and Saydam 2014). Finally, self and peer assessment should be promoted to raised positive feelings among learners (Al-Ahmad 2003; Magogwe 2015; Zhang 2011). The findings of these research studies emphasized the importance of motivation, attitudes, teacher feedback, and

assessment as influential factors to deal with anxiety and self-efficacy in writing classes.

The findings of recent studies reported that the main reason for writing anxiety was being afraid of negative feedback from the teacher through the gathered via interviews with EFL students (Rezaei and Jafari 2014; Lin and Ho 2009). Poor vocabulary knowledge and low proficiency levels were indicated as the main causes of writing anxiety (Genc 2017; Öztürk and Saydam 2017). It was asserted that the learners experience apprehension while writing because of linguistic incompetence which causes an inability to write what is intended to be expressed by the student. On the other hand, Cheng (2002) pointed out that the learners can have a high level of writing anxiety if they cannot produce or arrange ideas to write, and it was emphasized that developing the competence in writing skills is vital to help students in terms of getting over anxiety in writing. Other possible factors causing writing anxiety are time constraints, being afraid of making mistakes, and unfamiliar topics given for the writing task (Dal, 2018). It is a widely accepted idea by the other researchers that giving an unfamiliar topic to the students for the writing tasks can cause writing anxiety (Zhang 2011; Negari and Rezaabadi 2012). Thus, the learners need background knowledge to be able to write on the given topic, and if they do not have it, they feel apprehensive while writing.

Finally, the instructors agreed that writing skill is more difficult as a productive skill compared to receptive skills. In the interviews, they stated the probable source of writing anxiety and linguistic competence, time constraint, teacher feedback, and assessment. They associated the writing anxiety with insufficient input, adding the influential role of previous negative writing experiences, the difficulty experienced by the students while creating content for the writing task, and exam-related anxiety were the other possible causes of writing anxiety. When it comes to the challenges in writing classes, they stated that they must cope with negative attitudes of the students towards writing classes, students' lack of motivation, and their avoidance behavior regarding writing tasks.

In the existing literature, there has been a scarce number of studies emphasizing the instructors' perceptions and experiences about writing anxiety and its causes. As one of those studies, El Shimi (2017) investigated the perceptions of English teachers on writing anxiety. The results demonstrated that the educational background of learners and poor competence in writing skill was perceived as the major sources of writing anxiety which was supported in this study as well. This finding highlights the importance of raising positive feelings and practicing writing to decrease anxiety and help learners develop their competence in writing.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study offers some implications and suggestions to be addressed in English writing classes. First, the instructors should be aware of the abilities, beliefs, and attitudes of their students concerning writing skills to be able to monitor their



progress and solve the major problems, such as high level of writing anxiety or low level of writing self-efficacy among learners. Writing anxiety can be hazardous for their writing performance which can lead to various problems throughout the language learning process. The suitable and efficient ways to deal with writing anxiety and make the learning environment less anxiety-triggering should be discovered.

L1 writing anxiety can also affect the language learning process. If this situation is noticed by the instructor, some strategies should be employed to lessen the writing anxiety in both languages. For instance, the instructors can carry out an action research study to detect common points of the writing anxiety experienced in L1 and L2. The learners can be asked to express their opinions through free writings, diaries or journals, group discussions which allow the students to express their apprehension. Besides, differentiating instruction in writing class or using alternative assessment techniques can be some effective solutions. Learners can evaluate themselves or they can be evaluated by their peers to improve self-esteem in writing by supporting them with checklists and rubrics. It also makes it easier to reflect on the writing tasks and their concerns about their writing skills.

Having a better understanding of different types of writing anxiety can be helpful for instructors to be proactive and solve problems effectively. To illustrate, if an instructor recognizes some physical reactions such as perspiration, increasing heartbeat, trembling in writing classes or during writing exams, this refers to somatic anxiety, and it requires to employ some special strategies to get over this type of anxiety. Learning how to breathe and the other techniques for relaxation can help students control somatic anxiety in writing. On the other hand, the reactions given by highly anxious learners do not have to be visible as in somatic anxiety. The ones who suffer from cognitive anxiety in writing are afraid of being evaluated and getting bad grades or negative comments from the teacher. In this case, these kinds of students should be encouraged via constructive and non-judgmental feedback or writing tasks that will not be evaluated. As stated previously, negative evaluation and insufficient or unclear feedback can trigger negative attitudes and a lack of self-esteem. Therefore, the assessment of the writing should be objective and clear for the instructors and students. Using a rubric can help in terms of setting the criteria for the expectations of the writing task.

As one of the primary causes of writing anxiety, the problem of unfamiliar topics for the writing task should be solved by providing background knowledge related to the topic via reading texts. High quality and sufficient input are vital to produce the target language and getting input through extensive reading should be fostered among the students. If they get more input, they can produce more while writing in a better way. In the context of the current study, the learners were at the A2 (pre-intermediate) level of proficiency and had insufficient linguistic knowledge which can cause more pressure on them. For this reason, language learners with low proficiency levels should learn how to use dictionaries, books, and online sources effectively while working on a writing task. It can reduce their anxiety by providing help for the vocabulary, grammar, or content of the writing. If possible, the students

can determine the topics which are interesting or relatable for them. To achieve it, both learners and instructors should have good communication with one another, and the teacher should build rapport with the students in the class to be able to understand their interests, tendencies, and needs.

Writing tasks often require a long time, and language learners need sufficient time to learn to write and complete their writing tasks. The instructors can teach students how to manage time by setting time limits after some time in free writing. Besides, process writing should be promoted by working on staged writing with students. The instructors should not focus on the product solemnly. The pre-writing stage can reduce the anxiety level of highly anxious students by preparing them to write on the given topic each time. In this way, the students can learn the value of the process of writing which enables them to be more creative and motivated rather than being obsessed with the final product. Being aware of the relationship between the variables investigated in the study may enable EFL writing instructors to provide better learning experiences to their students and act upon the problems in their classes proactively. For this reason, the findings of the studies conducted on writing skill and the impact of affective variables on this productive skill should be taken into consideration by the practitioners, material and testing offices, and the administration as well to work collaboratively.

Further studies can work on learners with different language levels to investigate writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy and reveal whether language proficiency level makes a difference in the level of writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy. Another recommendation for future studies is that the other variables such as achievement in writing skill or motivation for writing in the target language and the relationship between them and writing anxiety can also be taken into consideration to broaden the perspective related to the nature of foreign language writing anxiety. Additionally, future research can investigate what kind of strategies and instruction work well to reduce writing anxiety and boost the writing self-efficacy of the students. To this end, experimental studies can be designed to be able to see the impact of the implementations. With the help of the findings, language teachers and instructors can improve the quality of their writing classes by adapting or adopting the implementations of the study. Finally, a longitudinal study can be carried out to observe the changes in writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy level over time to obtain more reliable results.

Following the results obtained, this study contributes to the existing literature by examining the level and type of writing anxiety, the level of writing self-efficacy, the relationship between the two affective factors, and lastly, the causes of writing anxiety perceived by the learners and instructors in Turkish EFL context. In the light of the gathered data, the study provides guidelines and implications for teacher trainers and practitioners about how to alleviate writing anxiety and raise the level of writing self-efficacy among language learners.

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