

WRITING ANXIETY: AN INVESTIGATION TOWARD EFL SECONDARY STUDENTS' IN INDONESIA

Kecemasan Menulis: Investigasi Terhadap Siswa Sekolah Menengah EFL di Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines the types and causes of writing anxiety among Indonesian secondary school students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). A total of 15 students participated in the research, which employed a questionnaire and interviews as primary data collection methods. Data were analyzed using four main steps: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that cognitive anxiety is the most prevalent type among students, with 13 students experiencing it, while two students experience both cognitive and somatic anxiety. Key factors contributing to cognitive anxiety include confusion, difficulty with grammar and vocabulary, and a lack of interest in writing tasks. Somatic anxiety is primarily linked to low self-confidence and a fear of making mistakes. These results suggest that students require targeted support and practice to build their confidence and competence in writing.

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the languages in the world, it is increasingly to the most foreign language taught at every school's level. It makes people who are non-native speakers compete to learn this language master. So do Asian countries, engages their level, in English, such as China, Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia? Iwai (2011) explained that English Foreign Language (EFL) refers to those who learn English in non-English speaker countries, and English as a Second Language (ESL) refers to those who know English in countries where English is used as a tool for communication and it is formally spoken. From that, explanation we can categorize Indonesia as one of the EFL countries, because Indonesia does not use English as its daily language.

As a non-native country, learning English is important for every group, person to learn English. Learning English is divided into two ways. Those are in formal and non-formal ways. The non-formal is people who learn English in autodidact practice for example the people who work on the beach where in their daily activities they are directly expressing the knowledge that they have learnt. Regardless of the correctness of the formality and the validity of the language and writing, the process. Then, formal ways are the people who learn English in a formal institution such as school, private, and other formal institutions that serve the honing of skills in the field of English. The ability of the formal learners is important to use in formal situations. They are not learning just in the speaking aspect but also in the culture, language selection, grammatical, and writing ability. The majority of formal learners are students. In Indonesia, English is included in local content subjects at the elementary school level and becomes a compulsory subject when at the secondary school level. There are several skills that students have to master in learning English. It is speaking, reading, listening, and writing skills.

As a country that does not use English as a mother tongue, it certainly has difficulties in mastering some of these skills. There are several problems were raised in English teaching and learning activities. Then the majority of problems experienced by students in writing English activities are that they always have difficulty multiplying their ideas in written form. This is because they are always afraid of writing errors in the arrangement of words and the absence of continuity between sentences. According to Marhaeni (2008) said that writing is the one of most difficult skills because writing is one of the complex achievements in language that involves several cognitive and linguistic achievements. Tran (2007) argued that writing has been conducted as a one-way educational activity, where the teacher is active and students tend to be passive. China also gets these problems According to Xiao (2007) teaching writing classes is not preferred by teachers in China. In Xiao research, the majority of students are frustrated, and overwhelmed by several problems such as a lack of English lexical expression and struggling with grammar, structure, and paragraph cohesion. Blanchard (2003) states that writing can be more difficult in a new language, in opposite English could involve the ability that can learn, practice, and master. In Indonesia Cahyono (2006) concluded that writing received sufficient attention in secondary school some things found that students have difficulties exploring their ideas and organizing sentences. As a non-native, writing skill is the most difficult skill that should be mastered. It was a demanding skill because the learners had to think of their ideas and translate them into English. Furthermore, the students should be paying attention to the grammar in their writing.

Writing anxiety of EFL students could defined by Bayat (2014) and Iwai (2011) writing anxiety EFL students refers to students who learn English in a non-English speaker country, and have difficulty in the writing class or writing process. Then based on Then, Ching-Ho (2016) explained that writing anxiety in the EFL field is the problem with idea expression and fear of negative feedback. Many students reported concerns about non-native-like expression and their monotonous writing style. That explanation indicated that writing anxiety is an uncomfortable problem for EFL students. So, the writing of EFL students is the experienced problem that is avoided by non-native students causing fear of negative feedback on their writing results.

For other reason author finds that several students have mindset that writing is not to important skill, because writing cannot be implemented in daily activity such as speaking and listening. Whereas writing skills could be implemented in the job environments, to be an English writer. Nowadays, the progress of the internet can be used by writers as a job, skill development, and expanding connections.

As a foreign learner cannot be denied that writing in English is a thought case. Kock & Cass (2011) explained three main cases that make students writing anxiety. There is instructional practice, low confidence in writing competence, and interpersonal threats contribute greatly to EFL students' writing classes. Al-Sawalha and Chow (2012) defined writing anxiety as a label for 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. Otherwise, writing is an enjoyable activity for some students as long as they see it as enjoyable work when they put their thoughts or ideas on paper. Cheng (2004) stated that writing anxiety is divided into three types, there was cognitive, somatic, and avoidance anxiety. Cognitive anxiety is explained as cognitive aspects of experience such as negative expectations, preoccupation with performance, and caring about others' perception. Somatic anxiety refers to psychological aspects such as nervousness and tension, and avoidance anxiety is the anxiety where students avoid writing. High expectations for writing are likely to contribute to increased writing anxiety, which can affect students' motivation and willingness to take writing courses. Based on the objectives of this thesis, previous research has explained that several reasons cause writing anxiety in secondary EFL students. A bad influence on one of the objects above can cause misperceptions in students in the writing class. Students are very worried about the assessment they will receive when delivering their assignments and writing activities. Thus, has a lousy impact on students' confidence in taking writing classes that will raise anxiety.

It is important to make EFL students fluent in the writing process, sustainable object is needed to escort the writing process so doesn't make anxiety on students' process (Kock & Cass, 2011). Writing has also been an important part of English teaching and learning activities Widiati (2006) explains that writing is beneficial for a language learner, it could be raising learners' creativity, concentration, and the bridge to expressing their ideas. Writing is important in secondary schools because it underpins the performance of students in most examinations Cocuk et al (2016). As foreign language English in the majority set and explored more in the secondary level of study, it caused in elementary-level students are only introduced to a basic understanding of English, and emphasize the mastery of easier skills such as reading and speaking. Therefore, the focus point in mastering writing skills is focused at the secondary school level. This is the reason for researchers to make secondary school students objects of research in this thesis. Furthermore, related to the phenomena researcher tried to implement and investigate research depend on the previous research, to get the main point of this thesis. The purpose of this research is to find out the causes of writing anxiety experienced by students so that it could be considered by the teacher to provide efficient teaching, methods, and steps in the writing class.

METHOD

The research was a qualitative approach where the study case was planned as research methodologies. This qualitative study has been conducted to explore anxiety; the relevant reason caused EFL secondary students feel anxiety in writing class. Qualitative research chose to scope in-depth detail of this case. Through the interview, the researcher intend to get more detailed information about this phenomenon. A case study defined as a method or research design that intensive study of a single unit to generalize across a larger set of units (Gerring, 2004, p. 342). Case study implemented as a methodology to get a deep exploration and describing a phenomenon in EFL secondary students in Indonesia.

In this study, the researcher chose EFL secondary students in Indonesia as a primary data resource with the English teachers' data and several journals as a secondary data. The researcher takes the objective of the research from three different classes of EFL secondary students who indicated, as data resources.

This qualitative study, where adopted qualitative and interview as a data collection technique. As Chin-Lin (2009) adopted interviews to explore deeper students' answer to open-ended questions. Interviews were adopted to survey the possible factors that cause students writing anxiety. The data was collected as long as 15 minutes by interviewing fifteen different students in Indonesia. Students are supposed to feel free and talk about anything they perceive that might causes their writing anxiety during the class activity and not. The students' statements were collected by recorder.

Through this study researcher asked students the question, the questions adopted by Chin-Lin (2009) and adapted by Kock & Cass (2011) and Tanveer (2007). There is the question: 1) How long have you been learning English? 2) How do you feel while writing in English? 3) State the difficulties that you experience while writing English! 4) Could you explain the difficulties that make you anxious in writing activities? 5) There are any situations that could make you feel anxious? State 6) Explain your strategies for coping with your anxiety. Those questions were given to students during the interview section to scope the information.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research interviewed the secondary school EFL students which included by fifteen students. Every single student interviewed in 10-20 minutes per student. Research questions consist of six main questions where it was just reflect the students' feelings, situations, and conditions while writing the activity. All of the questions were adopted by Chin-Lin (2009), Kock and Casss (2011), and adapted by Tanveer (2007).

1) How long have you been learning English?

The first question of the interview was How long have you been this question is aimed to know the firstly students get their writing task. The result was seven of the objects of the research said that they got writing tasks and activity in English class at the secondary level, specifically at junior level. Moreover, eight others were on the elementary level. The data showed that 47% of students knows English in Junior high school and 53% at elementary level. It means not all of the students get the same portion in learning English, especially writing. It might be caused by the unavailability of English as a compulsory subject at the elementary school level. This causes students newly learn English at the junior high school level. As the answer of Eka she said “.. sudaah, ehm berapa ya ... sudah dari itu lho kak, delapan tahun mulai dari MI...” (it’s been .. , uhm, how much... it’s been since, you know Bro, eight years started from Islamic elementary school). It could have an impact on the portion of students' knowledge that should have some vocabulary or grammatical structures as the initial foundation for English lessons could be hampered. The details could be seen in the following table.

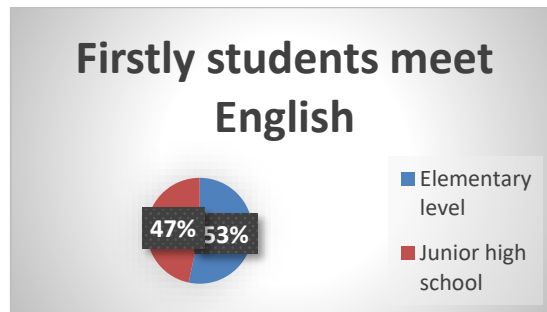


Chart 1. The percentage of students who firstly meet an English

2) How do you feel while writing in English?

The second question that is asked to the object is about their feeling when they write in English. There were a variety of their answer. Eight students or 53% said that they were indifferent caused by the materials were difficult and the teacher’s method was less attractive when serving the materials. Five of the objects or 33% said that they were fear of the writing activity caused by less of vocabulary and worried about making a mistake in arranging the word, sentence, or paragraph. Three of them or 20% enjoy writing activities caused they could get the new vocabulary. It indicates that the students feel less interested in writing class. It causes anxiety during the writing process. As an example of the students' answer Putra said "Kurang tertarik karena monoton saja gitu mas metode penjelasannya". (Not interested because it’s monotonous, bro, the method of explanation). Detailed see in the following table

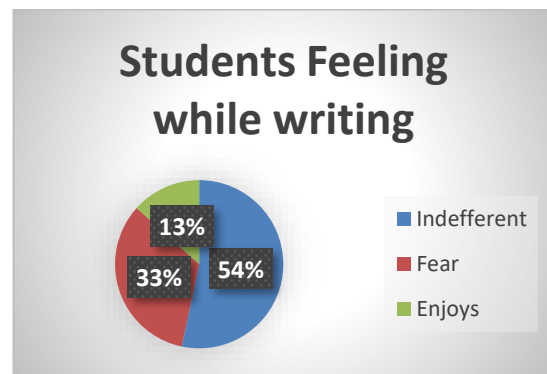


Chart 2. Students feel while writing activity

3) State the difficulties you experience in the course of writing English!

The third question is for the students to state their difficulties when the writing activity, task, and course. The goal of this question is to know the student's difficulty with writing to get a clear conclusion. The result is fourteen of students' problems and difficulties are in grammatical error and their vocabularies. They were felt in the writing activity arranging the words, connecting the sentences, and making a paragraph the difficult activities because they had to think about the next word and match it to the grammatical arrangement. It means that students understanding of vocabulary and grammar needs more attention to increase it. Several methods such as paying carefully for selecting of materials to ensure the suitability of materials with the appropriate difficulty, and encouraging small group activities could be implemented to try efficiencies. There were students named Silvi about her answer in the difficulties she said that "untuk writing sendiri saya masih memiliki banyak kesulitan kak, Seperti Grammar masih belum sesuai dengan kaidah Bahasa Inggris, ... untuk penulisan now yang artinya sekarang dan know yang artinya tahu itu...terkadang kalau kita tidak jeli dalam mendengarkan juga, akan anmyak kesalahan." (For writing, I still have many difficulties, Bro, Like Grammar is still not in accordance with the rules of English, ... for writing "now" which means now and "know" which means knowing it... Sometimes if we are not observant in listening too, there will be many mistakes). More detail is shown in the following picture.

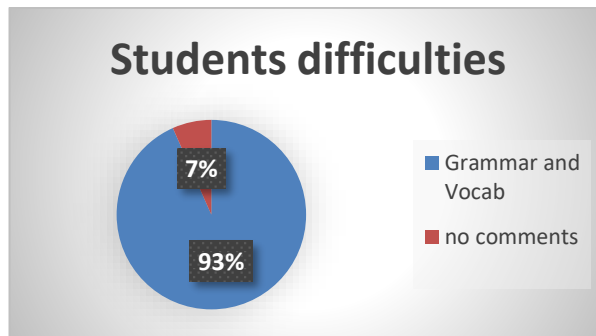


Chart 3. Students difficulties

4) Why do you sometimes feel anxious during writing activities?

The fourth question is the reason that caused students to have anxious feelings during writing activity. The result was divided into two data that caused writing anxiety. Firstly, the difficulties of the material understanding because the teachers' method is less interesting answered by ten students which means 67%. Secondly, students do have not enough self-confidence to do and show their tasks because of fewer vocabulary and they fear to make mistakes in grammatical structures, this was answered by five students, or 33% of them. One of the answers is from Alfian who said "...kalau masalah itu, jawabannya takut salah nulis aja saya mas, jadi ngefek ke artinya.." (...for those problems, the answer is just I'm afraid to make a mistake while writing, bro. so impacted the meaning). The second answer from Tasya she said that "...sulit kak, karena kurangnya kosa kata sehingga bolak;balik buka kamus." (...It's difficult, bro, because lack of vocabulary, so I go back and forth to open the dictionary). It means that teachers' method of serving the materials affected the students' interest and larning activity. The detail showed in the following picture

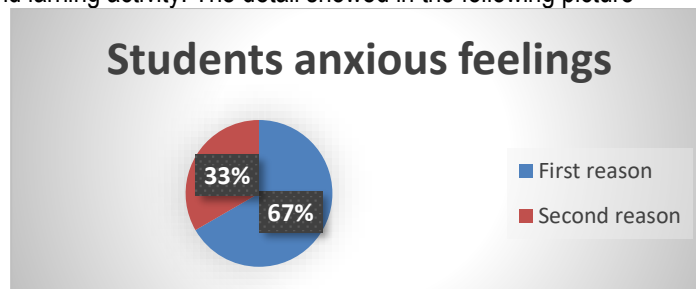


Chart 4. Students anxious feeling

5) There is any situation that could make you feel anxious? State!

The fifth question is about the situation that could make students feels anxiety while writing in English. There was judgment of the environment that made students less self-confident stated by five students, classroom crowd caused students to lose their focus when working writing task stated by two students, and time limitation stated by one student could be the reason that students have anxiety in writing class. One of the situations that also perceived by the author is crowded in the classroom which is also expressed by Putra he said that "...kelas yang gaduh,.. membuat kurang focus mas." (...the noisy classroom, ... makes less focused, bro). That means teachers have to manage the classroom to have an enjoyable situation for the students, might could put the competitive games to keep the classroom situation conditioned, competitive, and interesting. More details on students' perception of the classroom situation are shown in the following picture

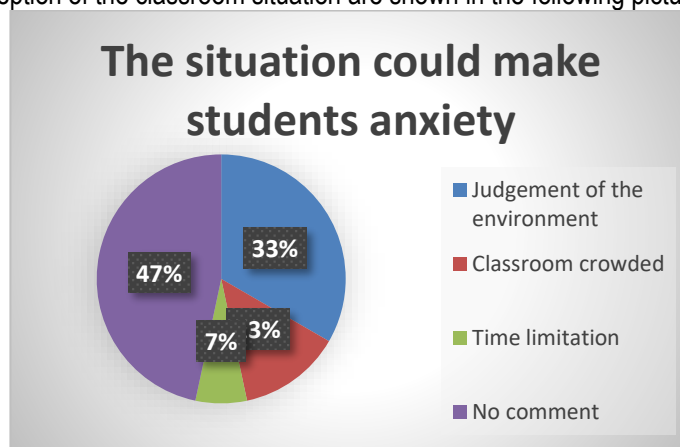


Chart 5. The situation could make students anxiety

6) Explain your strategy for coping your anxiety.

The last question is about students' learning strategies that could cope with their anxiety in writing. Students implemented many strategies to cope with their anxiety. The first to coping about cognitive anxiety there were fewer vocabulary they like to listen, watching a movie within subtitles stated seven students. Secondly, about grammatical errors, students will be collaborating with others to have more understanding in grammar as stated by eight students. The last is students utilizing the translator application to help them understand the meaning of the word, sentence, and paragraph this strategy is stated by twelve students. Then, the strategy to coping somatic anxiety in which students have less confidence in their papers they were have to train more, and teacher supervision is needed to reduce the adverse effect. For the first coping strategies stated by Eka she said that "... ya lebih enak mendengarkan lagu itu kak, ... setelah itu mencari liriknya. ..." (Ya it's better to listen to the song, Bro, after that, search for the lyrics). The other answer to coping unconditional situation is stated by Tasya she said "... kadang kalau saya tidak paham bisa kerjasama dengan teman biar lebih paham gitu kak. ..." (sometimes if I don't understand, I can cooperate with friends so that I understand better, bro). That means ,students have their strategies for cooping their anxiety. However, direction from the teacher is needed to keep them on the path of learning goals.

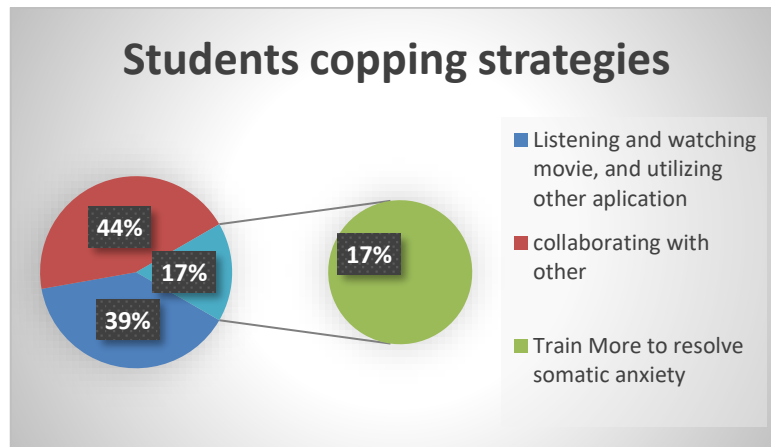


Chart 6. Students coping strategies

Based on Cheng (2004) anxiety is divided into three categories; those are Somatic anxiety, Cognitive anxiety, and Avoidance anxiety. This research will classify the data resources depending on Cheng (2004) and Nugroho & Ena (2021). They explained that Somatic anxiety refers to the personal situation and the understanding of the psychological consequences of feeling anxiety, such as nervousness and stress, Cheng (2004) describes that stress in Somatic anxiety is caused by time limitation. Next, Cognitive anxiety is the anxiety that shows a preoccupation with high performance and expectation, fear of negative feedback, low self-esteem, and poor linguistic knowledge. The last Avoidance anxiety Nugroho & Ena (2021) describe that avoidance anxiety refers to students' behavior. The type of anxiety where students avoid writing activity, such as students not coming to class while writing activity and not doing writing tasks. Depending on that classification, the researcher will be categorizing all of the data by those three categories.

Depending on the interviews done by the researcher, the data showed in data reduction that 13 of the interviewees had cognitive anxiety in writing class and two more had somatic anxiety and cognitive anxiety. The factors that cause cognitive anxiety are the students' confusion, difficulty, and less interest in writing class. Students who have cognitive anxiety claim that they have difficulties in grammar and vocabulary. Then, students who also indicated somatic anxiety is caused by less confidence in their paper, have a negative perception that if they make a mistake in their paper, such as being wrong in word, phrase, or paragraph arrangement.

There are many coping strategies that are stated by students which are divided into three. Those the first to coping less vocabulary are listening, and watching movies within subtitle stated by seven students. Secondly, about grammatical errors, students will be collaborating with others to have more understanding of grammar that stated by eight students. The last is students utilizing the translator application to help them understand the meaning of the word, sentence, and paragraph. All of those strategies could be applied to reduce cognitive anxiety. Next for the somatic anxiety students' answer is less-confidence in their paper, they have a negative perception that if they have a mistake in their paper, such as wrong in word, phrase, or paragraph arrangement. For somatic anxiety, teacher direction is needed to keep students on the path of learning goals.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the researcher concluded that the majority of anxiety of the EFL secondary students in Indonesia is cognitive anxiety. Data showed in data reduction that thirteen of the interviewees have cognitive anxiety in writing class and two more have somatic anxiety and cognitive anxiety. The factors that cause cognitive anxiety are the students' confusion, difficulty, and less interest in writing class. Students who have cognitive anxiety claim that they have difficulties in grammar and vocabulary. Then, students who also indicated somatic anxiety is caused by less confidence in their paper, they have a negative perception that if they have a mistake in their paper,

such as wrong in word, phrase, or paragraph arrangement. To coping their anxiety, there are many strategies. They indicated enjoy studying deeply about the materials and exercising more in writing activities by collaborating with the person that could put them in comfortable situations such as their friends or humble teacher who mastered writing. They need more practice to build their confidence in the writing class.

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