

INVESTIGATING THE CORRELATION BETWEEN WRITING ANXIETY AND ENGLISH CREATIVITY IN PAKISTANI ESL STUDENTS

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Abstract

The rationale of this correlational research was to explore the connection between writing anxiety and creativity among Pakistani ESL students. Thirty Pakistani ESL students (17 men, 13 women) made up the study's population. The research collected data using a combination of three tools (the IELTS essay prompt available at www.org.ielts, the IELTS scoring rubric, and the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory). Later, the data was analyzed using SPSS 23. The goals of the present investigation necessitated the use of Pearson's correlation. The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a moderately significant negative relationship ($r = -.479$) between Pakistani ESL students' anxiety and their creativity. This study found that among Pakistani ESL students, there was negative relationship between anxiety and their ability to write creatively.

Avoidance behavior was shown to be prevalent among ESL students.

Keywords: writing, anxiety, creative writing, Pakistani ESL learners, Pearson product moment correlation

1. Introduction

In ESL classrooms, students often engage in creative writing as a means of practicing the language either alone or in small groups. Students are encouraged to write creatively and try new approaches to writing by giving them "an autonomous, free-choice writing assignment" (Yeh, 2017, p. 16). Several studies (e.g., Arshavskaya et al., 2015) have shown that engaging in creative writing activities is beneficial for second language (L2) learners. Students of foreign languages report feeling inspired and interested while participating in creative writing exercises, for instance (Arshavskaya, 2015). Creative writing provides EFL students with a great chance to expand their linguistic horizons by exploring new forms of expression and reading audiences (Chan et al., 2008). A self-empowering tool to obtain a certain social stance and therefore self-esteem might be helpful for second language (L2) learners (Zhao, 2014, p. 452).

Higher levels of writing anxiety among second language writers have been linked to less effective writing in the target language (Sabti et al., 2019). Similarly, other studies across disciplines have linked anxiety to decreased creative output (Byron & Khazanchi et al., 2011) in the field of creativity research. There has been a lot of research on this topic, but surprisingly little is known about the effects of anxiety on creative writing among second language learners. Due to the nature of creative writing as a genre, students' anxiety about writing and thinking creatively may hinder their performance in second language



creative writing assignments. Writing requires a certain kind of intelligence, according to Lubart (2009). To properly understand the impact of anxiety on second language creative writing performance, it is necessary to reevaluate prior studies on second language writing and creativity that neglected to include the task specificity of second language creative writing.

This study aims to address that gap by investigating how Pakistani ESL students' levels of writing anxiety correlate with their levels of creative writing. Students who suffer from anxiety often find it difficult to begin creative writing assignments. Anxiety may be associated with ESL students' creative writing abilities. Because of the potential benefits to students' learning environments when teachers and researchers examine their connection to creative writing performance, this area deserves additional attention.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Anxiety

According to Horwitz (2001), anxiety is a well-studied topic in the fields of psychology and education. It is also a generally held belief among many individuals learning a second language (L2). It is said that anxiety is "a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system" (Horwitz et al., 1986: 125). There are three types of anxiety that psychologists identify: trait, state, and situational (Horwitz, 2001: 113). To put it simply, state anxiety is thought of as a reaction to specific anxiety-inducing situations, such as a major exam, as opposed to trait anxiety, which is seen as a permanent aspect of one's personality (Spielberger et al., 1983:1). Modern research has made use of a third category situation-specific anxiety to draw attention to the widespread and varied character of particular worries. In 1991, MacIntyre and Gardner were joined by Gardner and others. Public speaking and other similar situations may elicit linguistic anxiety, as first proposed by Horwitz (1986).

2.1.1. Writing Anxiety

Research into the effects of anxiety on writing stems from that of anxiety in vocal communication. Previous studies of this phenomenon sought to establish a causal relationship between vocal and written forms of worry. There was debate over whether or not there was a connection between high levels of oral and written anxiety; Hassan (2001) cited both sides.

Separating the elements of first-language writing anxiety from those of second-language writing anxiety (SLWA) was an aim pursued by Cheng et al. (1999). Researchers discovered that although second language writing anxiety is distinct from oral communication anxiety, the two types of language anxiety have commonalities at a deeper level.

Hassan (2001: 4) suggests that there are two types of writing anxiety: anxiety about writing in general, and anxiety about specific situations in which writing will be required and graded. Cheng's (2004) Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) is a three-factor L2 writing scale that measures Somatic Anxiety, Cognitive Anxiety, and Avoidance Behaviour, all of which contribute to the experience of anxiety. What is indicated by the phrase "somatic anxiety" (Cheng, 2004: 316) is an awareness of the physiological signs of anxiety, such as heightened uneasiness and tightness. The anxious mind is referred to as "cognitive anxiety" (Cheng, 2004: 316). This includes concerns like as whether or not you will be well received by others or how well you will perform. Avoiding writing is a common anxiety-related behavior (Cheng, 2004: 316). Cheng (2004: 331) explains that the negative correlation between test anxiety and L2 writing performance is due mostly to the cognitive components of test anxiety rather than physical components or avoidance behavior.



2.2. Creative Writing in English

The role of creative writing in second language learning has been the subject of many research (e.g., Abu-Rabia, 2003; Arshavskaya, 2015; et al.). Many elements have been investigated by researchers as potential influences on second language creative writing, such as working memory (Abu-Rabia, 2003) and task limits (Tin, 2011). Arshavskaya et al. (2015) and others have shown that students get many benefits from engaging in creative writing tasks, such as improved critical thinking and higher levels of learner engagement. Incorporating students' interests and passions into second language writing assignments may "make writing fun" (Tarnopolsky, 2000, p. 217, emphasis in original) and provide a powerful motivation for students to master the skill. Creative writing may benefit even those who lack motivation, according to Arshavskaya (2015).

Relationship between Anxiety and Creativity in Writing

According to previous research, there is a correlation between anxiety and creativity (e.g., Daker et al., 2020; Zhang, 2009). Researchers Zhang (2009) found that many different ways of thinking such as the legislative, liberal, and hierarchical styles correlate negatively with state and trait anxiety, which in turn correlates negatively with creativity. Carlsson (2002) found that those who scored higher on the creative scale also reported greater levels of anxiety. Creative anxiety, defined as "anxiety towards a way of thinking (i.e., thinking creatively)" (p. 43), was studied by Daker et al. (2020). Math, physics, music, and the visual arts were determined to have much higher levels of student anxiety compared to classes that required students to achieve noncreative standards.

A meta-analysis of 57 studies conducted on 59 different groups by Byron and Khazanchi (2011) found that low levels of creative capacity were associated with high levels of anxiety. Anxiety traits were shown to have a stronger correlation with creative output than anxiety states. One possible explanation put forward by Byron and Khazanchi for the former is that people's attention is piqued and their worry is "dissipate state (but not trait) anxiety" (p. 278) when they participate in creative pursuits. Further investigation into the link between state anxiety and creative performance in various settings is warranted in light of these findings.

Students' grades suffer when they experience writing anxiety, according to research (Rezaei, Jafari, & Younas, 2014). For instance, Daly (1978) found that students' elevated levels of writing anxiety resulted in inadequate signals, such as shorter and simpler structures, in their written work. Hassan (2001) found that, compared to pupils with high anxiety, those with reduced anxiety produced higher-quality writings. The results of Cheng's (2002) research were similar, confirming those of earlier studies. Students with high anxiety levels were shown to be less likely to enroll in writing courses. Writing anxiety has been shown to negatively impact quality of writing produced by EFL/ESL students in a number of studies (Cheng, Horwitz, & Shallert et al., 1999). Research by Naghaded et al. (2014) on the connection between writing anxiety and narrative proficiency indicated that the former significantly reduced the latter's effectiveness. In a recent research, Jebreil et al. (2015) discovered widespread anxiety among EFL instructors in Iran. Those at the elementary level were shown to be more anxious about writing in English compared to those at the intermediate and advanced levels. The results showed that among the many types of anxiety, cognitive anxiety was the most common, followed by physical anxiety and avoidance actions.

In a more recent study, Wang, H. C. (2021) looked at whether or not the accomplishment motivation and state anxiety of EFL students might be used to predict their success in creative writing. Seventy-one students from a university in Taiwan participated in a creative writing activity in English, and their responses were gathered. As part of this activity, students filled out the State Anxiety Inventory, an English language questionnaire measuring motivation towards verbal creativity, and a writing challenge. Four university English instructors read and scored each tale, resulting in a score for content



inventiveness and a score for linguistic correctness. The overall score for the creative writing performance was then calculated by adding the two scores together. Both state anxiety and creative writing performance were shown to have strong negative relationship with accomplishment motivation. Students' performance on the creative writing assignment was strongly predicted by state anxiety alone, indicating that those students who reported lower levels of anxiety did better overall on the test.

According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis of Second Language learning, the number of times a learner is exposed to easily understandable language is not a sufficient condition for improved language learning. Three primary factors anxiety, self-assurance, and drive are sometimes referred to as "filters." The students' ability to learn the language would be hampered if they have strict filters. Anxiety is an important emotional component in English literature. Students' interest and ability to write will suffer if they are overwhelmed by anxiety.

2.3. Research Questions

Research questions for this investigation on Pakistani English majors' fears of writing in English as a second language are as follows:

- 1) Does writing in English cause any Anxiety for Pakistani ESL students? How high is it?
- 2) What is the correlation between writing anxiety and creativity among Pakistani ESL learners?
- 3) What specific kind of anxiety is prevalent among Pakistani ESL learners?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between the variables and to provide an explanation of and context for any potential findings via the use of a correlational research methodology. Creswell (2012) defines correlation as "a statistical test to determine the tendency or pattern for two (or more) variables or two sets of data to vary consistently" (p.338). Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) add that "in associational research, the relationships among two or more variables are studied without any attempt to influence them" (p. 331).

3.2. Population

The population of this study was all the active second semester students of animal husbandry and nutrition department at university of agriculture Faisalabad.

3.2.1. Sample

Thirty students (17 male and 13 female) participated in the research. Animal husbandry and nutrition majors in their second semester at the University of Agriculture in Faisalabad made up the study's participants. Thirty participants were picked at random from a chosen group of fifty using a simple random selection method.

3.3. Instrumentation

There were three methods employed to gather information. Anxiety over writing was first measured using the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI). Second, a subject for essay writing and third was rubric of IELTS band descriptors for grading of such writings.

This section provides an in-depth analysis of them.



3.3.1. Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI)

The 22-item SLWAI (Cheng, 2004)-inspired questionnaire. Cheng (2004) developed the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) to measure a student's anxiety while writing in a second language. Because its validity and reliability have been confirmed by correlation and component analysis (Cheng, 2004), the SLWAI has been utilized in many studies addressing second language writing anxiety. The SLWAI consists of 22 items, each on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The higher one score, the more anxious is about writing in English as a Second Language. If one scored 65 or more, level of writing anxiety is high; if one scored 50 or less, level of writing anxiety is low; and if one scored somewhere in the middle, level of writing anxiety is moderate. Avoidance behavior (1,2,3,4,5,6,7), Somatic Anxiety (8,9,10,11,12,13,14), and Cognitive anxiety (15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22) are the three broad categories into which the SLWAI's 22 items fall.

The researcher made adjustments to the statements of the original 22 questions to make them more natural in Pakistani interpretation and more appropriate for the ESL learning setting in Pakistan.

3.3.2. Writing Task

In order to evaluate the students' writing skills, a writing assignment was used in this research. Students in this section are tasked with drafting an essay ranging from 200 to 250 words on a subject chosen from those available in IELTS drafting Task 2. Topic was "Children and Education" and title was trustworthy since it was sourced from the IELTS website. The participants were required to complete the writing task within 45 min.

3.3.3. Essay Evaluation Rubrics

The essay was graded on a scale from 0 to 9 based on the IELTS writing problem 2 rubric, which has four categories: task response, coherence and cohesion, lexical resources, and grammatical variety and correctness. It was a valid tool for evaluating texts. The British Council created it to assess candidates' abilities on the IELTS Writing Task 2. Each essay was graded by a single rater, four IELTS bands were used to determine the overall score of in writing. The total score obtained on the essay was used as score of creativity in writing of the ESL students.

3.4. Data Analysis

This study's data was analyzed using SPSS Version 23. The study's data was analyzed in different methods. The first step was a descriptive analysis, which outlined how the participants fared across the board. The second method, Pearson's bivariate correlation used to examine the correlation between variables. This study attempted to examine whether or not there was a significant correlation between participants' anxiety and their ability to write creatively.

4. Results

Descriptive data for both the anxiety scale and the creativity scale are provided in table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Anxiety and Creativity

	Anxiety	Creativity
Minimum	50.00	12.00
Maximum	77.00	23.00
Mean	65.23	15.76
Std. Deviation	7.70	2.9
N	30	30

Anxiety and Creativity statistics from a sample of 30 people are shown in the table. Both Anxiety and



Creativity are scored on numeric scales from 0 to 100; the lowest possible score for Anxiety is 50.00, while the highest possible score for Creativity is 23.00. The mean value is the average of all of the scores on that variable in the whole sample. The average score for Anxiety is 65.23, while the average score for Creativity is 15.76. That's a sign that, on average, people are more worried than they are creative. The standard deviation quantifies how much the data points are spaced apart from the mean. If the data points are farther dispersed from the mean, as indicated by a larger standard deviation, then the scores are more likely to be highly variable. The standard deviation for Anxiety in this situation is 7.70, whereas that for Creativity is just 2.9. Therefore, there is more variation in Anxiety ratings than there is in Creativity levels.

Question 1:

Does writing in English cause any Anxiety for Pakistani ESL students? How high is it?

Table 2

Level of Anxiety among Pakistani ESL Learners

	Number	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Total	30	50	77	65.23
High Anxiety	17	65	77	70.88
Moderate Anxiety	13	50	64	57.84
Low Anxiety	0	0	0	0

Table 2 displays the findings of the SLWAI and demonstrates the significant prevalence of ESLWA among Pakistani English majors. In the Method section it was explained that the SLWAI (Questionnaire I) has 22 questions with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A higher score there is indicative of more anxiety while writing in English as a second language. If one score over 65, level of writing anxiety is high; if one score below 50, level of writing anxiety is low; and if one score in the middle, level of writing anxiety is moderate. Table 2's descriptive data for the SLWAI suggest that ESL writers experience high levels of writing anxiety (Mean=65.23, >65). The possible range of the SLWAI is 22-110. The responses to this poll ranged from 50 on the low end to 77 on the high end.

Anxiety is present at a statistically significant level because the mean score is 65.23. Furthermore, 17 students (56%) were found to have considerable levels of anxiety (Mean=70.88), which may provide support for the idea that Pakistani English language learners experience large amounts of anxiety while writing in their L2.

Question 2:

What is the relationship between writing anxiety and creativity among Pakistani ESL learners?

Table 3 shows that there is a moderate and statistically significant negative relationship between measures of ESL writers' anxiety about putting pen to paper and measures of their ability to write creatively. It shows that a lot of anxiety over writing in English as a second language has a detrimental effect on creativity.

Table 3

Pearson Correlation between Anxiety and Creativity

		Anxiety Score	Creativity Score
Anxiety Score	Pearson Correlation	1	-.479
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.007
	N	30	30
Creativity Score	Pearson Correlation	-.479	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	
	N	30	30

The table 3 correlation coefficients show a modest and statistically significant negative relationship between anxiety and creativity. Anxiety and lack of originality seem to be somewhat correlated in this data set ($r=-0.479$). This indicates that the opposite is also true—that as anxiety rises, creativity tends to fall. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level with a p-value of 0.007, which is lower than the commonly used criterion of 0.05. This data supports the idea that the two variables are significantly related to one another in this set.

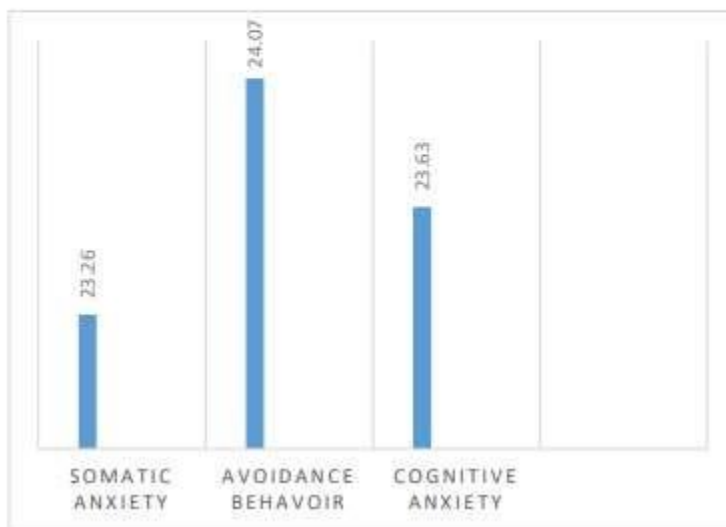
Question 3:

What specific kind of anxiety is prevalent among Pakistani ESL learners?

Somatic Anxiety, Cognitive Anxiety, and Avoidance Anxiety are the three types of anxiety measured by the SLWAI (Cheng, 2004). The distribution of the three categories of ESL writing anxiety was shown in Figure 1 by calculating the mean scores of the items relevant to each category. Avoidance Behavior is clearly the most prevalent kind of L2 writing anxiety among Pakistani ESL students.

Figure 1

Types of Writing Anxiety





5. Discussion

The study's primary objective was to look at how writing anxiety affects students' ability to write creatively while learning English in Pakistan. Pearson correlation was used to analyze the data, and the mean values of several anxiety instruments were computed to determine which form of anxiety is prevalent among Pakistani ESL students.

The first study question is addressed by showing that about writing anxiety has a negative effect on creativity. A moderate statistically significant negative connection ($r=-0.479$) was found between writing anxiety and creativity, answering the second research question. Students' ability to write creatively declines as their levels of anxiety increase. The third study question is addressed by the fact that avoidance behavior is the most prevalent and highest kind among Pakistani ESL learners when mean values of the three components on questionnaire are computed.

The findings of study are consistent with those of other earlier investigations. The first thing to note is that the study's findings are consistent with those of Zhang (2009), who likewise discovered a negative association between state anxiety, trait anxiety, and creativity. Second, Daker et al.'s (2020) investigation revealed that students' anxiety levels skyrocketed when they were asked to demonstrate originality, leading them to perform worse on creative writing assignments as a whole. According to Byron and Khazanchi's (2011) analysis, anxious people tend to be less creative. Anxiety over writing seems to have a negative impact on creative output, according to the results of this research.

Although those who scored higher on the anxiety scale also reported lower scores on the creativity scale, the results of research contradict those of Carlsson's (2002) study, which found that those who scored higher on the creative scale also reported greater anxiety levels. This study supports Krashen's affective filter hypothesis of second language writing, which postulates that when students are under stress, their writing suffers. The results showed that anxious students' performance suffered on the creative writing challenge.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine whether or not Pakistani ESL students' writing anxiety was linked to a lack of creativity in their written work. In order to address the research topic, the researcher opted for a correlational study design. The study's data collection and coding were accomplished with the use of three tools. The SLWAI Anxiety Scale, the Argumentative Writing Task from the IELTS, and the Band Description for Writing Tasks from the IELTS. The study participants were Pakistani ESL students, and the selection method was purely random. Thirty samples of Pakistani ESL students were used for this analysis. Anxiety and creativity were correlated using Pearson's product moment analysis to provide insight into the study's driving question. This study discovered a negative correlation between anxiety and creativity, and it was considered to be somewhat significant. High levels of anxiety have been linked to weak results in creative writing.

7. Limitations

Despite the study's significant results, numerous issues need to be addressed in follow-up studies. First, future research should think about expanding this sample size to improve the study's generalizability. Second, future research should investigate employing two or more raters instead of a single rater when evaluating essay writing to increase dependability. Third, future research should think about employing electronic devices instead of paper-based instruments for data collecting since the latter may adversely affect the quality of replies. The fourth drawback is that this research only focused on one form of creative writing "the essay" rather than exploring other possibilities. Nicholes (2017) demonstrates that the choice of writing prompts affects L2 students' level of interest in and connection to creative writing assignments. In light of these findings, future studies might revisit the links between worry and motivation in L2 writers.



Finally, the sample size was small since data was obtained from just one university in Pakistan; future research should try to increase sample size by include students from a wider range of institutions and language proficiency levels. These restrictions suggest the need for more study of creative writing throughout the language acquisition spectrum. Using correlation research, future scholars may modify several areas of coverage on ESL learners in Pakistan to get a more nuanced picture than is provided by the present study, which only addresses the writing anxiety portion.

8. Recommendations

Teachers of English as a Second Language should make the classroom environment and their teaching methods for writing appealing and provide students considerable freedom to express themselves creatively since anxiety has a substantial impact on their writing. Teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) writing should be aware of the effects of anxiety on their students and work with them to create emotional skills for use in ESL writing assignments. Test developers and curriculum architects should integrate tactics for calming the nerves of students who are learning English as a second language (ESL) via writing into the exams they create and the textbooks their students utilize. Moreover, relevant organizations should provide trainings for instructors and ESL teachers on how to best teach writing.


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