

Writing Apprehension Among Undergraduate EFL Students

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**Abstract**

This study aims to identify the level of writing apprehension experienced by undergraduate EFL students studying at departments of English at Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Education, University of Sirt. It also investigates how writing apprehension level influences their writing performance. Quantitative data were collected from 100 EFL students through Daly and Miller's questionnaire which called Writing Apprehension Test. The data were analyzed by employing descriptive statistics to show whether there was a significant correlation between the level of apprehension and the student participants' writing performance. The findings of the study reveal that the majority of student participants were highly apprehensive when writing in English. The results also show that there was a significant negative relationship between writing apprehension levels and the students' writing performance. Based on these findings, some recommendations and suggestions for overcoming writing apprehension experienced by students were presented at the end of this study.

**Keywords:** writing apprehension , writing performance , English as a foreign language

**ملخص الدراسة**

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد مستوى التخوف الكتابي الذي يعاني منه طلاب أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية الآداب التربوية بجامعة سرت. كما تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى قياس تأثير مستوى التخوف الكتابي على أدائهم الكتابي. تم جمع البيانات من 100 طالب باستعمال استبيان ( دالي وميلر) الذي يسمى اختبار التخوف من الكتابة. تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام الإحصاء الوصفي لإظهار ما إذا كان هناك ارتباط كبير بين مستوى القلق والأداء الكتابي للطلاب المشاركين. كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن غالبية الطلاب المشاركين كانوا متخوفين للغاية عند الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية. كما أظهرت النتائج وجود علاقة سلبية ذات دلالة إحصائية بين مستويات التخوف الكتابي وأداء الطلاب الكتابي. بناءً على هذه النتائج، تم تقديم بعض التوصيات والاقتراحات للتغلب على التخوف الكتابي الذي يعاني منه الطلاب في نهاية هذه الدراسة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التخوف الكتابي ، الأداء الكتابي ، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

**Writing Apprehension Among Undergraduate...****Introduction**

EFL students encounter many obstacles as they write in English (Erkan & Saban, 2011) because writing effectively requires students to have enough knowledge about the topic, the organization of the written text and vocabulary as well as the using of correct grammar, mechanics and cohesion and cohesive devices and others. Lack of knowledge about these significant components of writing would impede students from producing a good written text. Moreover, writing apprehension is another challenge which might encounter students as they write (Rose, 1980). Students' writing apprehension and anxiety which appeared through their practice of writing are due to their lack of confidence (Gungle & Taylor, 1989; Al-Ahmad, 2003). One of the writing apprehension signs is that the writer might be influenced by his negative personal feelings or attitude towards the writing (Hettich, 1994). Nervousness, or developing a very negative attitude or feeling towards writing is another sign of writing apprehension (Fraigley et al, 1981). Writing apprehension might also affect the professional writers who are excellent in writing. Suddenly, these writers might be unable to do so. Some scholars (e.g. Elias, 1999) emphasized on the enthusiasm of the writers, while others like Daly (2001) stressed on the negative aspects which discourage writers from writing by alluding to their negative attitudes towards the writing process which affects their ability to write.

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As writing apprehension is considered as one of the factors that impede students from writing well, many studies were conducted to investigate writing apprehension of English native learners (Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012). However, there are few studies investigate this issue in EFL context, especially with the Arab EFL learners (Al-Ahmad, 2003). In addition, most of these studies were conducted with primary and secondary EFL students.

Therefore, the present study focuses on writing apprehension experienced by undergraduate Libyan EFL students who are studying at departments of English and their native language is Arabic. It aims to identify the level of writing apprehension among EFL Libyan undergraduate English students when writing in English as well as investigating the relationship between EFL Libyan undergraduate students' writing apprehension and their performance. To achieve these aims, the following questions were formulated:

1. To what extent do EFL undergraduate students experience apprehension when writing in English?
2. Is there a significant relationship between EFL Libyan undergraduate students' writing apprehension when writing in English and their writing performance ?

### **Literature Review**

Writing apprehension has to do with the writer's mind, and it reflects his/her attitudes, thoughts and emotions which effect on his/her

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writing abilities (Daly and Miller, 1975). Writing apprehension is the unfavorable feeling or attitude that writers or young learners have directly or indirectly effect on their writing (Rankin Brown, 2006). It is a condition where a writer is scared or frightened of writing or become so nervous that he/she develops an unfavorable feeling towards the writing activity (Tighe, 1987). One of the writing apprehension signs is that a writer becomes unable to write, gets stuck along the way or unable to finish whatever he/she has started (Daly and Miller, 1975). Another signs of writing apprehension is nervousness or developing negative attitude of feeling towards writing (Fragley et al, 1981). This indicate that writing apprehension is one of the negative factors that impede learners from writing and finishing their writing tasks.

Writing apprehension also affects the professional writers who are excellent in their writing. Scholars (e.g. Ellis, 1999) emphasized on the enthusiasm of the writers while others (e.g. Daly, 2001) stressed on the negative aspects which discourage writers from writing and affects their ability to write by alluding to their negative attitudes towards the writing process. Daly and Fiagley (1981, 18) stated that the high level of writing apprehension is a result of " the individuals approach to avoid writing which in turn affects the writer's behaviour, attitude and writing performance".

As apprehension is found as a factor that negatively effects on the language learner, one cannot discount the fact that understanding the

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learners' apprehension is important in the field of language teaching and learning. Thus, many studies have investigated the relationship of language apprehension to language learning. One of the most important studies was conducted by Horwitz, and Cope (1986) who proposed the Foreign Language Classroom Apprehension Scale. This scale has become the basis of all foreign/second language apprehension studies. Other researchers focus on writing apprehensions and consider it as a main obstacle encountered learners as they write (Bline et al, 2001; Bugoon & Hale, 1983).

Thompson (1980) found that writing apprehension is a physiological process that occurs among learners who are afraid of the writing process and their inability to write. Marshal and Varon (2009) investigated the relationship between students writing assignments and writing apprehension. They found that there is a significant relationship exists between writing apprehension and the achievement in writing tasks. They concluded that writing apprehension and lack of confidence can be reduced through giving additional writing assignments to students.

Furthermore, many other studies were done to examine the relationship between writing apprehension and learners writing performance in L1 and L2, and most of them found that writing apprehension affect negatively on learners writing performance. For example, Faigley, et al, (1981) and Fowler & Ross (1982) found that writing apprehension correlate negatively with students' writing

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performance in L1. Similarly, Aida (1994); Cheng (1994) and Horwitz and Cope (1986) found that writing apprehension correlates negatively with learners' writing performance in L2.

On the other hand, few studies showed that writing anxiety (or apprehension) correlates positively with writing performance. One of these studies was conducted by Powers et al. (1979) who found that high apprehensive writers performed better than low apprehensive writers. It was also found that some poor writers are low apprehensive (e.g. Powers et al., 1979), while some high apprehensive learners are good writers (e.g. Bloom, 1980). In other vein, Kroll (1980) found no significant relationship between writing apprehension and grades in a large composition course. Cheng (2004) attributed these contradicting results to that some researchers used inadequate instruments for data collection and analysis in their research studies. He notes that most studies that employed the appropriate and adequate anxiety test in a second language context yielded a result that anxiety correlates negatively with academic performance.

Correspondingly, Boening et al, (1997) examined the relationship between writing apprehension and academic achievement among 75 male undergraduate honors students at the University of Alabama. Daly and Miller's Writing Apprehension Test was used as the instrument of the study. They were also asked self-report their grade point averages (GPA). The findings of the study revealed that the students had a moderate writing apprehension, and there is a low to

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moderate negative correlation between writing apprehension and students' academic performance (i.e.GPA).

The above review show the effect of writing apprehension on students writing performance and some causes of writing apprehension. To extend the previous research, this study focuses on the writing apprehension experienced by postgraduate English EFL students studying at Sirt University. It intends to examine the level of writing apprehension among EFL Libyan undergraduate English students when writing in English. It also aims to investigate the relationship between EFL Libyan undergraduate students' writing apprehension and their performance

**Methodology**

The study took place at the Departments of English, Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Education, University of Sirt. The student participants in the study were 100 undergraduate students. All of them were over 18 years old, and they were females and males. All of these students are Libyan and their native language is Arabic.

A quantitative methods was adopted to collect and analyze data of this study. Data of the study were collected by using questionnaire because it is appropriate to collect about people's knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior (Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2004). The items of the questionnaire were adapted from the version of the Writing Apprehension Test (Daly-Miller, 1975). They were 26 items on a five-

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point Likert-type scale (*strongly agree* = 1, *agree* = 2, *uncertain* = 3, *disagree* = 4, *strongly disagree* = 5).

Descriptive statistics was utilized to analyze the data of the questionnaire. The data were subjected to SPSS analysis yielding mainly descriptive data (Mean scores, standard deviations, Pearson correlation, frequencies, and percentages). This type of statistics was employed to show whether there was a significant correlation between the level of apprehension and the student participants' writing performance .

The questionnaire data were subjected to SPSS analysis yielding mainly descriptive data (number and percentage, which give summaries about the students' responses).

**Finding and discussion****1. Writing Apprehension Level among Students**

<b>N</b>	Valid	100
	Missing	0
<b>Mean</b>		1.3500
<b>Std. Deviation</b>		.55732
<b>Percentiles</b>	100	3.0000

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>Valid Per cent</b>
<b>Valid High</b>	69	69.0	69.0
<b>moderate</b>	27	27.0	27.0
<b>Low</b>	4	4.0	4.0
<b>Total</b>	100	100.0	100.0



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Table 1 shows that the mean and standard deviation for the writing apprehension level are  $M = 1.35$  and  $SD = .557$ . Table 2 demonstrates the majority of the student participants (69%) experienced a high level of apprehension. The rest of the student participants experienced a moderate level of apprehension (27%) and a low level of writing apprehension (4%). These results indicate that the average writing apprehension level among the students is high when writing in English. These results are similar to those found by Abbas (2016), Hanna (2009), Huwari and Abd Aziz (2011), Ismail et al. (2010), and Rezaei and Jafari (2014). This suggests that most EFL students experience writing apprehension as they do their writing tasks and this affects negatively on their writing performance. The high apprehension level among student participants could be a result of their lack of knowledge about the components of writing (i.e. appropriate vocabulary about the topic, correct grammar, content, organization of the written text, etc.). It might be due to their lack of confidence (Gungle & Taylor, 1989). Thus, EFL teachers need to give their students enough knowledge about the components of writing as well as encourage them to practice writing for boosting their confidence in writing.

**Writing Apprehension Among Undergraduate...****2. Correlation between Writing Apprehension Level and the Writing performance**

		<b>writing performance</b>	<b>Writing Apprehension Level</b>
<b>writing performance</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.323**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	100	100
<b>Writing Apprehension Level</b>	Pearson Correlation	.323**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	100	100

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

Table 3 show that the Pearson Correlation coefficient value of  $r=.323$  and  $p=1$  which is higher than the significant level 0.01 ( $p<0.01$ ). This indicates that there is a significant relationship between writing performance and the level of writing apprehension. This indicates that there is a negative impact of writing apprehension on students' writing performance. These findings are similar to those found by Trylong (1987) who concludes that there is a negative relationship between students' apprehension levels and their language performance. Thus learners should also have enough information about writing skills and the processes and the strategies used to overcome writing apprehension (Daly- Miller, 1975, Lee, 2002). Moreover, poor writers need to keep an eye on spelling and grammatical errors, as this may result in interference between the planning process and the translation process (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Teachers also need to ask their

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students to practice writing inside and outside classroom. This practice would help them to decrease the level of writing apprehension among the students and reflect positively in their writing performance.

### **Conclusion**

This research study was conducted to identify undergraduate graduate students' writing apprehension level, and how it affect their writing performance. The results of this study suggest that EFL students in Sirt university experienced high language writing apprehension. Based on the findings of the study, pedagogical implications can be inferred, and this might help policy makers and students to address the persistent problems among EFL students. One of these implications is that writing strategies should be promoted among students to encourage them reduce their writing apprehension. In addition, teachers, to reduce the students writing apprehension, need to tailor writing tasks that suit the different levels of students and adopt teaching methods that can assist students improve their writing skills. Moreover, teachers need to choose interesting topics for writing. Teachers also need to encourage their students to practice writing inside and outside classrooms and ask them to do many writing tasks. This might boost students' confidence to write and reduce their level of apprehension.

The students participants in this study were 100 undergraduate EFL students, and this sample is considered reliable. However, the results

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might not be generalized as larger sampling might yield different findings. Thus, it is recommended that future studies which will investigate the relationship between writing apprehension and students' performance need to recruit larger sampling. They might also study not only the relationship between writing apprehension and students' performance, but also the relationship between students' age and writing apprehension.

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