

## Investigating the Correlation between Anxiety and Writing Proficiency of University Undergraduates

1. Muhammad Kamran, M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Applied Linguistics, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan. ([muhammadkamran9070@gmail.com](mailto:muhammadkamran9070@gmail.com))
2. Dr. Rashid Mahmood, Professor, Department of English, Riphah International University, Faisalabad Pakistan ([ch.raashidmahmood@gmail.com](mailto:ch.raashidmahmood@gmail.com))
3. Ifrah Fatima, Lecturer, Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Faisalabad, Pakistan. ([Ifrah.fatima-5@tuf.edu.pk](mailto:Ifrah.fatima-5@tuf.edu.pk)) (Corresponding Author)
4. Muhammad Asim Khan, Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Applied Linguistics, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan. ([asim142@gmail.com](mailto:asim142@gmail.com))

### Abstract

The primary purpose of this research is to investigate the correlation between anxiety levels of university undergraduate students and their writing ability. This study employed a correlational research approach, utilizing Cheng's (2004) Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory questionnaire (SLWAI), which consists of 22 items divided into three sections: Somatic Anxiety, Avoidance Behavior, and Cognitive Anxiety. Additionally, provided blank papers to the participants so they could write an argumentative essay. This study involved a sample of 100 students enrolled in the Department of Applied Linguistics at Government College University Faisalabad. Statistically analyzed the collected data using SPSS, Pearson correlation, independent sample t-test, Group Statistics (Gendered base Difference), and other descriptive statistical tools for this study. This study showed a negative correlation between anxiety and the writing proficiency of university undergraduates. The Pearson correlation showed a value of -0.041, and the P-value was 0.689. Results showed a non-significant association between these two variables. The results of this study focused on students in their second and fourth semesters, aligned with previous studies identifying the complex relationship between anxiety and writing proficiency in academic settings. This research contributes to the understanding of the relationship between writing anxiety and writing skill among university undergraduates, highlighting the psychological factors that influence academic writing capabilities and providing guidance on reducing anxiety levels to improve writing abilities.

*Keywords:* anxiety, writing proficiency, cognitive, somatic, pearson correlation, spss, Pakistan, GCUF, Faisalabad, undergraduates

### Introduction

Anxiety, one of the most common mental health issues affecting students in universities (American College Health Association, 2023), stands to diminish different aspects of performance writing skills. Although effective academic writing is critical for success in college, the process demands cognitive attention and emotional self-control, two factors that may suffer when anxiety is present (Zeidner et al. 2001). Nevertheless, the effect of anxiety on writing ability has remained an under-researched area, particularly in terms of the relationship between these two cognate constructs among undergraduates.

However, there is insufficient information on how anxiety levels affect writing ability with university undergraduates. Some of the mental illnesses include anxiety which have all been confirmed to impair normal thinking and cognitive processes including attention, memory and solving skills (Eysenck et al., 2007). When it comes to the efficiency of the writing process, several issues should be highlighted. As the writing process requires the student's cognitive and emotional engagement, the anxious student may experience problems in idea generation, organization of the material and the resulting written work in particular (Zeidner et al., 2001). Moreover, anxiety can lead to avoidance behaviors, in which students avoid, or are reluctant to perform writing activities, which compound their problems (McLeod, 2008). It also, however, leads to the continuity of anxiety and hinders satisfactory academic performance. General insights into how anxiety leads to decreased writing performance should help respond to the needs of anxious writers in colleges and universities.

There are several theoretical factors which show how anxiety decreases writing fluency and cognitive interference is one of them. Anxiety displaces attention from the task at hand and more particularly from the writing task by directing it to the anxiety sources, and since idea generation, including idea organizing and the subsequent transcribing of such ideas into the text in a coherent and well thought manner requires distinct attention, anxiety therefore interferes with such a process (Zeidner et al., 2001). Second, anxiety interferes with working memory – a crucial executive ability for handling and transforming information which in turn affects writing (McLeod, 2008). However, anxiety also leads to the impairment of different elements of self-regulatory activities including emotional and motivational spheres that contributed to the decline of the writing performance. Writing apprehension, especially aspects such as FNE cause decreased levels of self-efficacy and may lead to students giving up before they complete the writing process (Bandura, 1997). These cognitive and affective responses results in the decrease of the quality of the writing outcome in terms of organization, development of ideas and overall message (Liu and Ni, 2015).

However, it is also important to note on the background of the study that the general negative correlation between anxiety and writing proficiency does not hold itself in all students. A study indicates that writing experience, personality characteristics, and coping profiles all act as the important mediators that determine the effect of anxiety on the quality of writing produced (Stewart et al., 2015). The performance of writing may also be disrupted more in the students with high anxiety but perceived coping skills than in those who lack these strategies. Hence, knowing the cognitive, affective and behavioral mechanisms of this association is crucial for animating effective treatment of the anxious writers. Special attention to improvement of coping strategies and individual assistance allow universities to address the anxiety issue and foster development of the writing skills which in turn lead to higher learning outcomes (Graham & Perin, 2007).

Anxiety now appears to be one of the major signs of declining mental health throughout the world (WHO, 2017) including Pakistan. Another factor is stress which has recently affected the student population in Pakistan where academic pressured especially in light of a learning system that favors performance, as defined by tests and examinations. This increasing academic pressured IB increased stress which suppress students writing skills (Khan & Ali, 2015). Writing ability is a major determinant of academic achievement in Pakistani students and most PBS students fail to perform well in writing because of language difficulties, approach to teaching and learning and lack of learning resources appropriate for writing improvement. Moreover, there keeps on being an immense social stress due to cultural norms and inadequate mental health facilities in school making it even more challenging for student to deal with anxiety. However, it is noteworthy that there is not enough work done focused on

the interaction of anxiety and writing skill for native English, and especially in the condition of Pakistani students, while the Pakistani higher education has been expanding at a very fast pace and come under powerful pressure in recent years (Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, 2023). This literature gap therefore, calls for a study that explores the level of anxiety that affects students' writing ability specifically among students in Pakistani universities. Therefore, the findings emphasized an understanding of this type of problem to better address academic and psychological challenges for developing effective interventions and support systems for students in Pakistan.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study aimed at assessing how anxiety and writing skills of the university students in higher learning institutions is related within Pakistan. This study will target specifically University Undergraduates, this population group is most vulnerable to academic stress and mental health issues that affect the cognition and affective states required in writing. Several forms of anxiety such as general anxiety, writing anxiety, and stress anxiety will be compared with and contrasted with the ability of the participants to come up with ideas as well as organize their work, make it coherent, and even choose the correct grammar to use. In addition, this research also aims to find out the specific educational culture of the Pakistani university where the students are more focused and under pressure in the academics side while the counselling facilities are not adequately available for the students. Thus, this study shall also look into linking anxiety to levels of writing skills; the factors such as language differences, cultural norms, and teaching approaches that may either amplify or reduce anxiety on writing, shall also be highlighted. Therefore, the proposed study will contribute to the existing literature on the learning and psychological consequences of Pakistani students to support teaching and counselling strategies to improve students' composition and general academic performance. The results may also help with other debates about mental health issues in school to support a robust approach to learner development.

### **Problem Statement**

The statement of the problem for this study deals with the identification of proportional or inversely relationship between overall anxiety levels of university undergraduates and their overall writing capacities. Since writing is a standard that has become greatly valued in college education it is important to analyze the manner in which anxiety in terms of avoidance behavior, cognitive anxious and somatic anxious can poorly impact the writing skills of the students. The purpose of the research is to understand how anxiety interferes with aspects such as, brainstorming, arrangement, and logical flow necessary in academic writing. Furthermore, it aims at defining particular genres of anxiety that influence the blending, which leads to the writing troubles, for instance, the tendency to procrastinate or decreased ability to concentrate and recall information, which impairs written work. Through exploring these relationships, the study will contribute enormously towards understanding how writing and anxiety can impact on students' performance and overall well-being, as well as help to increase awareness of this important issue in the existing literature on student achievement and well-being. It is of high importance for this exploration to consider university undergraduates specifically, as the academic pressure they are exposed to combine with poor access to professional help may worsen these kinds of anxieties. ; Hence, the implication of this study could provide insights into the development of strategies that take into consideration students' psychological needs as well as their academic difficulties in order to promote enhancement in writing and academic performance.

## **Research Questions**

- 1) What is the relationship between anxiety level and writing proficiency among university undergraduates?
- 2) How does writing anxiety affect the writing proficiency of university undergraduates?
- 3) Is there a gender-based difference in the impact of anxiety on males compared to females?

## **Literature Review**

It is very important to note that Anxiety is more than a feeling or a state of mind, it is an overwhelming and debilitating emotion that manifests itself as fear, worry and stress and expresses itself physically as headaches, fatigue, restlessness and lack of concentration (American Psychological Association, n. d.). Although anxiety is expected at some time, intense or chronic anxiety is very likely to limit and distort daily activities. In the following section, several theories aiming at the formation and sustenance of this condition will be discussed. Let's take the cognitive-behavioral view, for instance, which postulates that anxiety is caused by cognitions and behaviors that are warped and inefficient. Whereas, the biological theory focuses on the role of genes or neurochemistry where anxiety is thought to be caused by imbalances in the brain and chemicals such as neurotransmitters (Barlow, 2002). Shifting the focus to other aspects that are equally important to address anxiety, it is necessary to mention psychological ones as well as biological and environmental ones.

### **Theories Supporting Anxiety**

Some reasons which are in favor of the opinion that anxiety is like are The Cognitive Behavioral theory, Self-efficacy theory and Social Comparison theory. All these theories aid and assist anxiety.

#### **Cognitive-Behavioral Theory**

According to CBT, writing anxiety is due to negative self-evaluations about writing, which are irrational thoughts (Beck, 1976). Performance in writing may be hindered by negative self-talk such as 'I must be unable to write well' which makes one anxious (Elliot & Dweck, 1988). Some of the behaviors exhibited by individuals with writing anxiety comprise avoiding writing related tasks and selection of straightforward writing tasks, which tend to support their negative perceptions (Harris & Ertmer, 1991).

#### **Self-Efficacy Theory**

Writing anxiety could be a consequence of the decreased beliefs in the ability to write as given in Bandura self-efficiency theory (Bandura, 1977). Low writing self-efficacy may lead to experiencing anxiety as well as avoiding writing tasks because one threatens to question their competency. According to Schunk (1989), the self-efficacy of writing can be improved through prior writing, feedback and observation, and from learning from others.

#### **Social Comparison Theory**

Students evaluate themselves as writers through the comparison with others, and this evaluation is in line with social comparison theory advanced by Festinger (1954). Generalised writing anxiety may be heightened and feelings of incompetence may arise when one subject themselves to upward social comparison, which is comparing oneself to better writers. Conversely, negative social comparison might hinder on writing skills at the same time boosts self-esteem levels as pointed by Morse and Gergen (1970).

## **Achievement Goal Theory**

The achievement goal theory whose foundation was laid by Dweck in 1986 postulates that the writing goals that individuals have framed their motivation as well as anxiety levels. Performance anxiety can occur from written performance, it can come from performance-oriented writers focusing on doing well and not failing. Writing anxiety could in fact be reduced or even eliminated by mastery-oriented authors who are more inclined to focus on learning and learning accomplishments (Elliot & Dweck, 1988).

## **Anxiety Sensitivity Theory**

The anxiety sensitivity theory, as proposed by Barlow (1988) predicts that persons who experience high anxiety sensitivity will feel anxious while writing. These people have taken the aspect of fear to new levels and avoid such situations as they view normal bodily sensations as early indications of approaching disaster.

## **Types of Anxiety**

Specifically, anxiety disorders are a group of disorders which, due to specific exhibited symptoms and behaviors, are diverse in nature, and as such constitute a topic of complex clinical and educational study. Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is one of the most common specific phobia, in which a person exhibits excessive and persisting worry about multiple life events without apparent reason. That is why this constant concern can cause a rather severe decline in a person's productivity at school/ work as well as one's overall well-being. Another frequent condition is Panic Disorder, characterized by presentations of one or more spontaneous panic attacks defined as short periods of sudden fear or discomfort with physical manifestations like light headedness, chest pain and breathing difficulties. Being a result such episodes can trigger more anxiety and especially with regard to future attacks. Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia) is another gross problem and has been categorized as a pathological fear of social situations and the likely rejection or ridicule by others. This fear has tendency to manifest in avoidance behaviors, for instance, avoiding social functions, or speaking in public. A second type of phobia, Specific Phobias, is also common where the patient has excessive, irrational fear and avoidance behavior with respect to specific objects or situations often environment related such as heights, spiders, and flying. These phobias can greatly limit the opportunities of a person for providing an overall fulfilling and satisfactory life. Another type of anxiety is Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), which includes activities or mental activities including washing hands or checking something in order to prevent, neutralize or eliminate unwanted, distressing thoughts. Likewise Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder which results from a traumatic event. This is expressed as flashbacks and nightmares for example, in addition to low emotional well-being, which affects that person's quality of life. However, it is equally important to note that it is often the case that the symptoms of these anxiety disorders may be comorbid meaning that a patient may manifest symptoms of more than one condition besides, to diagnose any of these conditions, mental health practitioners have to conduct further assessments before administering the appropriate remedies. It was such complexity which underlined the call to raise awareness of anxiety disorder especially when conducting the study of its existence among university students with reference to their academic performances and overall well-being.

## **Measurement of Anxiety**

Anxiety is not a very easy construct to measure, which is why anxiety cannot be measured by a single instrument or a single assessment tool. In response to this, different

diagnostic instruments and approaches used to measure the severity and effects of anxiety symptoms are commercially available for the clinician as well as the researcher. Self-administered checklists are one of the most prevalent techniques using self-assessment of the presence and frequency of symptoms in line with a set of statements. For example, the seven-item scale of the Somatic Anxiety 7-item scale (SOM 1-7), the seven-item scale of the Avoidance Behavior 7-item scale (AV 8-14), and the eight-item scale of the Cognitive Anxiety 8-item scale (COG 15-22) developed by Cheng (2004) The Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) are explained to consider the more pointed aspects of anxiety These are self-assessment questionnaires that give an objective but a phenomenally invaluable glimpse into the extent of anxiety that a person is experiencing. However, in order to have objective measures, administer questionnaires and enhanced self-reports by conducting clinical interview with the patients involved using psychiatrists psychologists or any mental health professionals to rate the severity of anxiety as per the duration, intensity and amount of interference it has in the lives of the identified patients. In these more structured or even professional kind of interviews, the clinicians are able to find out if an individual meets the DSM criteria for an anxiety disorder or its general severity. Direct observation is another technique used; in this case, is anxiety manifested by symptoms such as frequent deep breathing, sweating, and increased heartbeat, which are closely observed during condition which induces anxiety. In other standard conditions, objective reactions are kept based on the subjects' physical condition, including the rate of heartbeat, blood pressure, skin conductivity, concentrations of cortisol in blood. These are basically objective measures, which are often applied in either research or clinical settings as adjuncts to other forms of assessment. As well, by using the functional assessment of anxiety which takes into account the impact that anxiety has on one's ability to go to work or school, engage in social interactions, etc., it is possible to gain a much better understanding of how anxiety impacts a person's life. These various methods play the significant role in the identification of the problem and when combined assist clinicians and researchers in the qualification of a more targeted approach to the treatment of anxiety disorders.

## **Writing Proficiency**

Writing, a fundamental academic skill set that is deemed to be of paramount importance as students' progress through their college years (Flower & Hayes, 1981). However, much has been written about the correlations between various psychological variables and the achievement of academic goals, and the effects of anxiety have received significant attention (Zeidner et al., 2001). The purpose of this research is to establish the link between anxiety and writing skills among university undergraduates proposing the theories to explain the connections.

## **Theories Supporting the Writing Proficiency**

### ***Cognitive Theory***

In the cognitive process theory, writing entails several techniques, including prewriting, drafting, revising, and proofreading (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Anxiety can impair certain cognitive functions since attentional resources are directed to information not useful towards the task, and WMC is increased (Eysenck, 1984). In conclusion, nervous writers might have a problem doing the following; generating ideas, structuring the ideas and even writing proper prose.

## ***Schema Theory***

Following schema theory, readers and authors use existing knowledge structures with which to construct meaning and create text (Rumelhart, 1980). Since anxiety distorts the process of getting faster access to the schema, it is easy to find that the required material is hard to find and if found, it cannot be used successfully in writing (Tobias, 1990). Therefore, to the extent that writers could get nervous, they would be hard pressed to state substantively the argument they wished to present and so their writing would be less intelligent and orderly.

## **Socio Cultural Theory**

Focusing on the roles of context and cultural artifacts, the role of sociocultural development in writing has been identified by the work of Vygotsky (1978). Crediting MacIntyre and Charos (1996), anxiety is disadvantageous in social ways as it decreases interpersonal writing and interactive interactions. This may limit opportunities to use the language when writing as well as limit the practice necessary for the development of writing skills. Moreover, there are societal factors whereby beliefs concerning writing and success (Kirschner and Graham, 2018) could influence anxiety levels and the writing performance of students.

## **Types of Writing Proficiency**

There are many ways in which written language can be used and all can be appropriate depending on context for certain goals and receivers. Expository writing targets texts and technologies that instruct regarding events, characters and storylines normally seen in novels, short stories and memoirs. In contrast, descriptive writing seeks to create sketches of people, places or events, is generally applicable for travel writing, poetry, descriptive essay and so on. In contrast, expository writing is explanatory and contented to embrace evidence, facts and data like research papers and Textbook. Argumentative writing aims at changing a reader's opinion about an issue and is mostly used in opinion pieces, adverts and speeches. Persuasive writing is similar to argumentative writing; however, argumentative focuses on backing up the writer's opinions with evidences accompanied by counter arguments which are common in writing essays and legal writing. Technical writing is more task-oriented and is usually used in manuals, instructions; scientific texts and other comprehensive information where the main emphasis is made on clear presentation of information. Letters and writings refer to arts that enable one to illustrate his or her ideas as well as emotions, and they include novels, poems, and scripts. Business writing aims at expressing the message where it has to be formal and straight, to the point in business and society examples include reports, proposals, emails, etc. Expository writing is formal and is used in institution writing context and best represented by term papers, dissertations and journal articles. Finally, the art of blogging and writing has evolved as a part of the digital communication that includes all the diversification scope, issues, and concerns; and it is addressed through blog posts, articles, as well as social media posts. All these types have their functionality and using the appropriate skills of communication, each type is useful.

## **Relationship between Anxiety and Writing Proficiency**

Anxiety and writing skill are inextricably connected, and it depends on the individual, anxiety can hinder their writing or can be used as incentive that enhances learning among students. In many cases anxiety will actively interfere with the process of generating and

organizing one's thoughts or with the practical experience of writing and seeing the result, the anxiety may be unduly productive in creating doubts or a focus on perfectness. This may lead to overdoing the task by rewriting or develop fear that discourages people from writing at all. However, for some people, such as students and business persons that require concentration in achieving their goals, anxiety acts as a stimulus to increased concentration. This is because the people in question can direct the resulting anxiety to their drafts, which, in turn, enhances their concentrations as well as creativity. This cycle depicts an interaction whereby poor writing skills affect increases anxiety levels and in the same breathe poor anxiety reduces writing skills. That is why, while it is accurately stated that anxiety does impair the ability to write, there is always the other side to the story, or the other set of writers who might just as well use that anxiety to their advantage during the writing process. It showed that different strategies that include one that focuses on goal setting, stress control and seeking assistance may be effective in dealing with anxiety of the concerned learners and may result to improvement in the writing abilities of the learners.

### Previous Studies

Research on learning anxiety and performance in written materials show both negative and complicated influence on writing skills. Similar to the research on writing apprehension, Fitrinada et al. (2018) reported that EFL students at Sriwijaya University have moderate to high level of anxiety in writing and established a negative significant correlation between anxiety and achievement of -545 (\*\*, 0.5) {Insert Table 6} Thus, Fitrinada and colleagues' data showed that anxiety explained 29.7% of the variances of writing performance Writing anxiety concerning Pakistani ESL students was investigated by Khan et al. (2021)—and those authors found out that anxiety influenced the writing performance negatively and notably impacted the extent of creativity. Khan et al., (2021) opined that anxiety caused by fear of censure and perfectionism inhibits key processes responsible for writing creativity tasks and coherent production. This concurs with Miller and Crowe (2015), who noted that as a result of anxiety the normal train of thoughts is interrupted and creativity is impeded. Besides, Khan and colleagues (2021) noted that motivation could act as a mediator; and proposed that increasing motivation can mitigate the effects of anxiety and improve the creativity of writing. In a similar study, Puspita (2016) discussed and defined writing anxiety in Indonesian ESL learner; he or she pointed out that factors, integrating insufficient non-content specific knowledge, linguistic retardation, and lack of self-confidence can cause writing anxiety. The study also pointed to embracing other teaching approaches like the use of teaching aids and playing in order to relieve anxiety and thus help the students write better. Taken together, these studies show how anxiety influences writing proficiency with a call for optimizing motivational writing practices that promote creativity and reduce anxiety effects on writing achievement.

An investigation of writing anxiety and writing performance formula asks for the interdependence of psychological factors on writing, especially in EFL. The sequential relationship between motivation and state anxiety was established by analyzing success-related motivation, showing that higher motivation facilitates high writing performance though it decreases anxiety. The study also revealed that performers' state anxiety depresses creative writing performance, and therefore pointed to the importance of implementing anxiety intervention measures in order to improve performance. In the same line of argument, Nodoushan (2015) found out that situational, trait and state anxiety influenced the writing performance of EFL students. More precisely, whereas situational anxiety was beneficial for writing, state anxiety negatively affected fluency. Majidifar and Oroju (2015) built on the literature about psychological factors affecting writing by investigating the interaction between



test anxiety and self-efficacy and observed that, while students with low self-efficacy and high test anxiety struggle highly in writing compared with others with high self-efficacy and low anxiety. Using Afghan EFL students, Quvanch, and Kew (2022) also established that language difficulties, time constraints and the self-constructed pressure of getting a low mark are the major causes of writing stress. In the course of the study, the researcher recommended that the by adopting friendly teaching approaches, could help in decreasing pupils' anxiety level thus improving their writing abilities. In combination, these studies give a clear implication for educators in directing and handling writing through motivation– enhancing interventions, adequate instructions and clime-free environment in a bid to actually improve on writing performance among EFL students.

Several studies have been conducted to determine the correlation between writing anxiety and writing motivation and, more importantly, writing proficiency and how this correlation presents counterintuitive features. Collectively, Siska et al. (2021) have investigated these factors concurrently and only revealed a negative linear relationship between writing anxiety and writing proficiency as well as the non-significant relationship between writing motivation and writing proficiency. Interestingly, they found that writing motivation and writing anxiety do affect writing competency but the relationship are complex and worthy of future work. Cheng (2002) went further to Eliaborate on factors causative to L2 writing anxiety, perceived writing competence was shown to be a more robust predictor of anxiety than obtained scores in writing. Furthermore, this study pointed out difference by gender where female students manifested higher level of anxiety score. Zhang (2009) further looked at the moderating effect of thinking style on anxiety finding out that creative and cooperate thinking style were negatively associated with anxiety but positively with conservative thinking styles. This reflects on cognitive style as a determinant of anxiety, the thinking that increased creativity would decrease anxiety. Last but not least, Güvendir et al. (2023) also mentioned that according to Eysenck's Attentional Control Theory L2 writing anxiety affects grammar problems in writing in a negative way and constricts working memory because of high anxiety leads to less syntactically complex writing. Altogether, these studies echo the call for the complexity sensitivity in practice and theory with regard to the causes and effects of the writing anxiety on students' progress.

In the current literature, the present investigation establishes that a great deal of research exists on the link between writing anxiety and writing performance, but several gaps emerge, especially in the sample under investigation, which is the university undergraduates. Some previous research, for instance, by Siska et al. (2021) and Cheng (2002) have both used motivation and writing anxiety along with proficiency as their independent and dependent variables, respectively While these kinds of researches have historically investigated the correlation between writing anxiety, motivation, and proficiency, they address single factors or use selected samples only, and scientists pay no attentions to moderation effects of some environmental or socio-cultural factors. Moreover, the existing literature link writing anxiety to writing performance showing some consistency (Wang, 2021; Khan et al., 2021): however, the exact manner writing anxiety affects writing performance have not been well explained in detail. For example, Güvendir et al. (2023) investigate the load resulting from anxiety but fail to conceptualize how anxiety impacts creativity and cognitive skills related to writing in high-stakes educational contexts that imply significant accountability. Further there is evidence regarding writing anxiety in students, the differences in the level of anxiety found in Majidifar and Oroju (2015) as well as in Zhang (2009) highlighted considerable variations in the levels of writing anxiety among students However, limited studies have focused on how such differences, including cognitive styles and self-efficacy affect the overall writing skills of the

undergraduate students irrespective of their field of study. Therefore, the link between writing anxiety and writing proficiency is known; however, the differences, the interaction between variables, such as motivation, self-efficiency, and cognitive profiles have been studied insufficiently, especially concerning university undergraduates. This gap is for more research which not only will carefully determine and describe these relations but also will study kinds of interventions which may help to decrease anxiety and increase level of attain writing skills in academic context.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This research will employ a quantitative correlational research design. Research design called correlational research is used to determine the link between two or more variables. Writing ability and anxiety were the two factors on which this study focused. Thus, in order to ascertain the link between these two variables, the correlational study design was employed. Additionally, the correlational design will demonstrate whether these variables and the outcome of high or low computations are related.

### **Population**

The study's population consisted of second- and fourth-semester BS English Literature and Linguistics students at Department of Applied Linguistics Government College University in Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan's. There were 100 Students in the entire population.

### **Sample**

The researcher used simple random sampling for collecting the data. A sample of 100 students was used in this research, in which fifty students were from second semester and fifty students were from fourth semester consisting of both male and female.

### **Instruments**

Both a written exam and a questionnaire were employed as study instruments. An assessment of writing proficiency was carried out, and a questionnaire was used by the researcher to measure anxiety.

### **Questionnaire**

The students' anxiety was measured in this study using the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) questionnaire. Cheng (2004) designed this device. There were twenty-two Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) statements in the questionnaire. There were three sub-sections on the questionnaire: (1) Somatic Anxiety, with seven statements; (2) Avoidance Behavior, with seven statements; and (3) Cognitive Anxiety, with eight statements. After this questionnaire, there was a Likert scale. Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Neutral=3, Agree=4, Strongly Agree=5 on the scale that goes from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The researcher used other researchers' surveys for this investigation.

### **Writing Test**

Writing test was used by the present researcher to find out students writing proficiency. The students were asked to write an argumentative essay consisting of 350 words, entitled as "Is Co-Education Beneficial for Students?" After that, these papers were checked by two different paper checkers. The evaluations of these papers were based on IELTS essay test band

rubrics. The contents of IELTS essay band rubrics were, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics etc.

## **Data Collection Methods**

For data collection purpose in this research, the researcher gave questionnaires and writing test. The researcher did some procedures to collect the data. The data collection was about determining two variable first one was Anxiety and second was writing proficiency of university undergraduates.

### **Anxiety Questionnaire**

The study employed a questionnaire that was adapted from Cheng (2004). Therefore, in order to start collecting data, the researcher first asked the relevant class lecturer at Government College University Faisalabad's Department of Applied Linguistics for permission to conduct study. The researcher asked the individuals to be study subjects after receiving their consent. Next, the researcher would organize the instruments (anxiety questionnaire).

The second stage involved giving the researcher an overview of the study's objectives and advising them to properly complete the questionnaire, assuring them that it is solely for research purposes and would not affect their grades. In order to ensure that every participant completed the questionnaire, the researcher then gave the class a printed copy of the form and instructed them to complete it in the allotted 20 minutes.

### ***Essay Writing***

Before collecting the data, the researcher distributed the blank sheets for measuring the writing proficiency of the students. For this purpose the researcher asked to the student to write an argumentative essay entitled as “Is Co-Education beneficial for Students?” so this writing test was employed to the students and they were asked to write 350 words within 40 minutes. So when the students completed the essay test they were advised that every student must fold your anxiety questionnaire within their essay paper sheet so they did the same. After this the researcher started the collecting the data and thanked to the whole class for cooperating in this research activity.

The researcher collected this data. It was almost done within one week to collect the data. It was because the data was collected from two different classes from second semester and fourth semester class of BS English Literature and Linguistics, so within one day it was difficult to collect the data. So the collected data were coded with numbers 1 to 100. So the questionnaire items were computed in excel sheet and were coded with different variables. The written essay were given to the two different teachers to mark the essay on the basis of IELTS rubrics in which the main focus was Grammar, Vocabulary, Cohesion and Coherence etc. so the marks given by the two different raters. These marks were computed on Excel sheets with relevant id no. The next procedure was to find the correlation between two continuous variables like relationship between anxiety and writing proficiency of university undergraduates.

## **Data Analysis Procedure**

### **Descriptive Statistics**

In the current study, the researcher used IBM SPSS software to examine the relationship between two variables—*anxiety and university undergraduates' writing proficiency*—after data collection. Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed by the researcher for this aim.

## **Pearson Correlation**

A test that measures how much two variables are linearly related is the Pearson's correlation coefficient. The correlation coefficient, which is commonly represented by the letter "r," has a value between -1 and 1.

- +1 denotes a perfect positive linear relationship.
- -1 denotes a perfect negative linear relationship.
- 0 denotes no linear relationship.

Positive correlation and negative correlation are statistical terms that used to describe the direction of the relationship between two variables.

### **Positive Correlation**

When two variables have a positive correlation, one increases when the other does as well and vice versa when one variable falls. Stated differently, the two variables follow the same path. Positive correlation is the name given to these kinds of correlation. Below are their respective values.

The correlation coefficient (Pearson's  $r$ ) ranges from 0 to +1.

- A coefficient close to +1 indicates a strong positive correlation.
- A coefficient ranges from 0-0.5 indicate moderate positive correlation
- A coefficient around 0 indicates a weak or no correlation.

### **Negative Correlation**

When there is a negative correlation, one variable rises while the other falls, and so on. To put it another way, the variables move against each other. Negative correlation is the name given to this kind of association. The values of these are listed below.

The correlation coefficient (Pearson's  $r$ ) ranges from 0 to -1.

- A coefficient close to -1 indicates a strong negative correlation.
- A coefficient around 0 indicates a weak or no correlation.

## **T-Test**

To find out if there is a significant difference between the means of two groups, a statistical test called a T-test is utilized. Knowing if the mean differences are statistically significant or just probably the result of chance is helpful. Depending on the data and the hypothesis being tested, there are various kinds of t-tests

### **Independent (Two-Sample) T-Test**

- Used when comparing the means of two independent groups.
- Example: Comparing test scores between two different classes.

### **Paired (Dependent) T-Test**

Used when comparing means from the same group at different times (e.g., before and after a treatment).

### **Limitations of the Study**

Thus, the following limitations are inherent to this study. In this regard, the first source issue lies in restricted generalization of the conclusions drawn since the research is carried out

only in a particular area. Secondly, since the study used self-reports for anxiety and writing skills, then it is possible that the findings are affected by subjective biases. Additionally, generalization of the findings may also be limited by the target sample, which was university undergraduates, and hence the study's findings may not reflect the experience of learners at lower classes. Finally, variable's like, socio-economic status, academic history and quality of teaching are still potential confounding factors in the results despite attempts to make them insignificant.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the data collection and analysis regarding the research challenge will be explained in this chapter. Data presentation, tests for correlation, tests for descriptive statistics, research findings, and discussion are all included.

In the present research the results were obtained by statistical software IBM SPSS on the basis of following research problems. Here is detailed explanation of results obtained through collected data.

The purpose of the current study was to look into the connection between university freshmen' anxiety levels and writing ability. The present study's results did not show a significant link between these characteristics, which was contrary to predictions based on some prior studies suggesting a negative correlation between these variables. A small and non-significant association is indicated by the Pearson correlation value of  $-.041$  ( $p = .689$ ), indicating that anxiety levels did not significantly affect writing proficiency in this population.

**Table 1**

*Pearson Correlation between Anxiety and Writing Proficiency*

		Anxiety	Writing Proficiency
<b>Anxiety</b>	<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	1	-.041
	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>		.689
	<b>N</b>	100	100
<b>Writing Proficiency</b>	<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	-.041	1
	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	.689	
	<b>N</b>	100	100

Based on the result obtained from SPSS, it is clear that anxiety has negative relation with writing proficiency and has very weak correlation with it. The most affecting type of anxiety was Cognitive anxiety.

To determine the Gender base difference in the impact of Anxiety and Writing proficiency on Males as compared to Females following tests were used.

In comparison to male participants ( $M = 67.49$ ), female participants in this study reported mean anxiety levels that were somewhat higher ( $M = 69.50$ ). It is important to remember, nevertheless, that both groups' standard deviations were somewhat high, showing significant variation in anxiety levels within each gender. This implies that although there may be a small trend for women to report higher levels of anxiety, there is no consistent pattern observed

throughout the sample.

An independent samples t-test was used to determine whether the observed difference in mean anxiety levels between genders was statistically significant. According to the data, there was no statistically significant difference in anxiety levels between male and female students, regardless of whether equal variances were assumed ( $t(98) = .950$ ,  $p = .345$ ) or not ( $t(83.672) = .933$ ,  $p = .354$ ). This shows that although anxiety levels varied somewhat between genders numerically, there is no statistically significant difference and the difference could just be the result of chance. Table is given below

**Table 2**

*Group Statistics (Gendered base Difference)*

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Anxiety Female	53	69.5042	8.93742	1.22765
Male	47	67.4932	12.15441	1.77290

The t-test indicates that there is no significant difference in anxiety levels between males and females, with a t-value of 0.950 and a p-value of 0.345 (greater than 0.05). The mean difference between the groups is 2.01096, but the confidence interval (-2.19181 to 6.21373) includes zero, further indicating that there is no significant difference in anxiety levels between males and females in this sample.

The Levene's Test for Equality of Variances ( $F = 1.644$ ,  $Sig. = 0.203$ ) suggests that the variances between the two groups are not significantly different, so we use the row "Equal variances assumed" for interpretation.

**Table 3**

*Independent Samples Test*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for equality of means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Interval Lower	Confidence Upper
Anxiety Equal variances assumed	1.64	0.203	0.950	98	0.345	2.01	2.11	-2.19	6.21

<b>Equal variance not assumed</b>	1.64	0.203	0.933	83.672	0.354	2.01	2.15	-2.27	6.29
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According to the findings, anxiety is inversely related with writing proficiency among the university undergraduates although this can be considered as low correlation. The Pearson correlation coefficient of anxiety and writing proficiency is  $-0.041$  and the significance value of writing proficiency and anxiety is  $0.689 (p > 0.05)$  thereby implying that these two variables are not significantly correlated by a linear relationship. This weak correlation indicate that although anxiety might have some influence on the writing proficiency it is negligible and not significant in this sample of students. Additionally, it was identified that cognitive anxiety was the most detrimental kind of anxiety. However, the Opposition hypothesis is still the only one that can explain the negative link, so further analysis cannot overlook mediating or moderating factors including the individual levels of writing skills that can further attenuate or even overwhelm the impact of anxiety on the writing fluency.

The findings of the present study indicate that writing anxiety exerts a negative impact on the writing ability, even if the relationship between the two variables documented in this study is quite low. Solely considering the different types of anxiety, cognitive anxiety or worry and mental distraction seem to be the most detrimental to writing ability. This means that whenever students are engaged in worrying, they may be unable to concentrate on writing since probably their resources are being used up by worrying. Nevertheless, because the relationship between WA and writing skills in the current study is relatively low, it may be concluded that the effects of writing anxiety decrease or increase depending on other factors that can be intrinsic, such as the student's past writing experience, motivation, or extrinsic, such as external conditions. Because writing anxiety is associated with lower standards in writing, its impact is not as strong in this sampling in this study as may be expected; thus, future studies should conduct other investigations to identify other moderating or mediating factors.

The study indicates that there is no gender divide where students' anxiety levels and/or their anxiety levels affecting their writing abilities are concerned among male and female students. A small but statistically insignificant difference was obtained when comparing female participants with male participants for the mean anxiety level,  $t = 0.950$ ,  $p = 0.345$  ( $p > 0.05$ ) whereby the females reported more scores ( $M = 69.50$ ) than the males ( $M = 67.49$ ). The confidence interval for the mean difference between genders ( $-2.19181$  and  $6.21373$ ) also contains crossing through the middle zero; therefore, the observed difference can be attributed to chance. Further, aggravating the above inference, the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances yields the value  $F = 1.644$ , possessing a sig. value of  $0.203$ , which indicate that it is an error to assume a significant difference between the variances of anxiety levels within male and female students, and as such, again, we can assert that for that sample, gender does not correlate with anxiety's effect on writing performance These findings are in conformity with the literature that shows that gender could sometimes remain insignificant in writing anxiety associations albeit some papers indicating vaster anxiety inclinations amongst females (Cheng 2002).

The results of the current study regarding the relationship between writing proficiency of university undergraduates and their anxiety levels is a weak negative correlation with a correlation coefficient of  $-0.041$  and a significance value of  $.689 (p > .05)$  thus make signifying

that there is in fact minimal and non-significant effect of anxiety on writing proficiency. In this study, cognitive anxiety was indicated to be highly consequential type of anxiety, but it has a low impact on the writing performance; thus, the other factors such as experience, motivation, or availability of cognitive resources could moderate or mask the effect of anxiety. Furthermore, there was no significant variation in the effect that anxiety has on writing ability across the gender divide. On the basis of gender differences, analysis revealed that female students had slightly higher anxiety scores ( $M = 69.50$ ) than male students ( $M = 67.49$ ) but the difference was non-significant ( $t(98) = 0.950, p = 0.345$ ) and the confidence interval ( $-2.19181$  to  $6.21373$ ) showed no differences between the two. Accordingly, the results highlight that anxiety cannot be viewed as a critical factor in student writing and claim that writing anxiety is not the decisive factor in writing performance. This situation therefore requires more investigation on other psychological, cognitive and context factors that may lead to variations in writing performance of university students.

The results of the current study support various temporally well-established theory of anxiety and writing skills, but they also extends certain specificities for further investigation. Based on Cognitive-Affective Model of Writing developed by Perkins & Craig, 2009, there is the possibility that enhances working memory can be affected by writing anxiety and most especially the cognitive anxiety hence the poor writing skills. The identified in the study of cognitive anxiety as the most influential type of anxiety in support of this model, however, the mild negative relationship between anxiety and writing performance ( $-0.041, p = 0.689$ ) indicates that may not be enough to indicate that cognitive load is the only major factor that can determine the success in the writing in this case. The Attentional Control Theory (Eysenck et al., 2007) might also partly account for such effects, as anxiety is said to decrease the available amount of attentional capacity, and elevated levels of anxiety could interfere with task performance. However, the finding of this study does not support the generalizability of this theory for university undergraduates for there was no significant correlation between anxiety and writing skill. Moreover, there is no statistically substantial difference in anxiety between male and female students ( $p = 0.345$ ), contrary to Cheng (2002), who highlighted the effect of higher female anxiety level on writing ability. This may be so given that writing self-efficacy difference could be explained by some of the contextual factors in the sample such as culture and education associated with writing in the context of the cultural and educational background as posited by the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997). All together these findings account for the theoretical correlation between anxiety and writing skills, yet, they reveal complication and variations of such relation, hence calling for additional mediating factors that might envelope students coping mechanism, writing background, classroom context etc.

The conclusions of the present study can be considered a confirmation or addition to several prior studies focusing on the connection between anxiety and the level of writing. For example, Wang (2021) as a similar study of the current study regarding this context established a negative relationship between anxiety and writing. However, the Pearson correlation was only  $-0.041$  in this study, and as compared to the rather different results which Wang got, therefore, one could stay tuned to sources like writing tasks or cultural settings that may mediate the anxiety-performance relationship. This is in line with Cheng's (2002) paper where L2 writing anxiety was a potent predictor of writing performance however the current study revealed a comparatively small sized negative association between anxiety and writing proficiency. More importantly, there is no gender difference in anxiety levels; unlike Cheng's (2002) study where female students recorded higher levels of anxiety. This difference may arise from cultural and institutional differences; while the sample of this study was a group of Hong Kong university students, the current study was based within a geographical and



academic context compared to broader studies. However, the findings of Quvanch et al. (2022) Majidifar and Oroju (2015) show that anxiety particularly affects the writing aspect as the latter distorts the students' cognition and emotion processes. The present study affirms these claims but raises the idea that other factors like self-efficacy or test anxiety (Majidifar & Oroju, 2015) may also have special importance for examining in relation to writing proficiency results. This is in consonant with the Assertion Control Theory advanced by Eysenck and his team (2007) which stated that anxiety diverts the attention required for efficient writing. Therefore, although the present study supports what has been reported in prior research, it underlines the necessity to develop more elaborate models by which interrelations between anxiety, self-efficacy, and writing ability can be understood in various settings.

## Conclusion

The present study intended to examine a correlation between anxiety and writing skill among the university undergraduates in order to determine how anxiety affects writing proficiency. The results showed that there is actually no significant interaction between anxiety and writing proficiency since the correlation index was equal to  $-0.041$ , and the probability value was equal to  $0.689$ . The analysis used descriptive statistics, t-tests, and correlation coefficients to analyze the interaction of these variables in this research. Although it is well understood that anxiety can pose as a threat to a learner's ability to write well this study showed that there may be moderators or even decrease the effects of anxiety on writing performance. Thus, it is consistent with studies showing that anxiety, as a rule, is associated with performance decrement, but the nature and the extent of this association largely depend on methodological factors, type of sample, and kind of context.

On those accounts, the following recommendations to the students, educators and the universities have been made based on the findings of this study. Students should learn how to differentiate between normal stress and anxiety, and then practice techniques to minimize its effects, incorporating it into writing practice to enhance the learner's mastery of the skill. People in the educational system can help in reducing the anxiety of such students by creating a favorable learning environment that denies any opportunities for anxiety to occur by encouraging communication and providing adequate instructions calmly undertaking the division of tasks and providing constructive criticisms frequently. Additional steps to minimize writers' anxiety and improve their writing, include prewriting activities which include, giving talents low-risk writing assignments and encouraging proper health lifestyles. Academic institutions should provide writing center services involving workshops and tutoring, and student services for the management of learners' mental health. When institutions incorporate mental health advocacy and writers' assistance as an important component of students' curriculum, they can help students achieve two goals at once – writing improvement and mental health enhancement.

This study recommend the funding of such programs and support the policies aimed at decreasing anxiety and enhancing the practice of teaching writing. By so doing, the universities can assist the students to develop proper writing skills though at the same time, the universities can assist the students to overcome the psychological factors that tend to negatively influence their performance in their studies.

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## APPENDIX A

## Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI)

University: GCUF

Department: Applied Linguistics

Semester: \_\_\_\_\_

ID No: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: Male

Female

Other

### Family Background Information:

Citizenship: Rural

Urban

Parental Education: Educated (Above Matric)

Uneducated (Below Matric)

This Questionnaire is developed to investigate the effects of anxiety on L2 Writing. For each of the question below, choose the response that best characterizes how you feel about the statement, where, 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = no strong feelings either way; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree).

### Somatic Anxiety Subscale

Sr#	Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
SOM1	I feel my heart pounding when I write English compositions under time constraint.	1	2	3	4	5
SOM2	My mind often goes blank when I start to work on an English composition.	1	2	3	4	5
SOM3	I tremble or perspire when I write English compositions under time pressure.	1	2	3	4	5
SOM4	My thoughts become jumbled when I Write English compositions under time constraint.	1	2	3	4	5
SOM5	I often feel panic when I write English Compositions under time constraint.	1	2	3	4	5
SOM6	I freeze up when unexpectedly asked to write English compositions.	1	2	3	4	5
SOM7	I usually feel my whole-body rigid and tense when I write English compositions.	1	2	3	4	5

**Avoidance Behavior Subscale**

Sr#	Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
AV1	I often choose to write down my thoughts in English.	1	2	3	4	5
AV2	I usually do my best to avoid writing English compositions.	1	2	3	4	5
AV3	I do my best to avoid situations in which I have to write in English.	1	2	3	4	5
AV4	Unless I have no choice, I would not use English to write compositions.	1	2	3	4	5
AV5	I would do my best to excuse myself if asked to write English compositions.	1	2	3	4	5
AV6	I usually seek every possible chance to write English compositions outside of class.	1	2	3	4	5
AV7	Whenever possible, I would use English to write composition	1	2	3	4	5

**Cognitive Anxiety Subscale**

Sr#	Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
COG1	While writing in English, I'm not nervous at all.	1	2	3	4	5
COG2	While writing English compositions, I feel worried and uneasy if I know they will be evaluated not conform to the norm of English writing.	1	2	3	4	5
COG3	I don't worry that my English compositions are a lot worse than others'.	1	2	3	4	5
COG4	If my English composition is to be evaluated, I would worry about getting a very poor grade.	1	2	3	4	5
COG5	I'm afraid that the other students would deride my English composition if they read it.	1	2	3	4	5
COG6	I don't worry at all about what other people would think of my English Compositions.	1	2	3	4	5
COG7	I'm afraid of my English composition being chosen as a sample for discussion in class.	1	2	3	4	5
COG8	I'm not afraid at all that my English compositions would be rated as very poor.	1	2	3	4	5