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EXPLORING WRITING ANXIETY AMONG SINDHI UNDERGRADUATE ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the level of writing anxiety among Sindhi ESL students. The data was collected through the Second Language Writing Inventory (SLWAI) developed by Cheng (2004). The participants were ($N=20$) students studying English Linguistics and Literature at Sindh Madressatul Islam University in Karachi. The data collected was manually calculated and scored using Zhang's (2011) method. The results showed that Sindhi ESL learners experience a high level of anxiety when writing in English, particularly cognitive anxiety. Additionally, female participants experienced more somatic anxiety than males. Finally, the study found that practicing, journaling, mind-mapping, and receiving feedback from teachers were the most common coping mechanisms used by Sindhi ESL learners to manage their writing anxiety.

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is a commonly studied topic among researchers and theorists in second language learning as it can have a negative impact on the learning process. Second language learners may experience anxiety in all areas of language development, including speaking, reading, listening, and writing. While it is normal for learners to feel anxious or fearful in a language classroom, these emotions can sometimes become a serious obstacle to learning the language effectively. As a result, researchers are interested in understanding the levels and causes of anxiety among learners so that teachers can take appropriate measures to help them overcome it. English is a popular second language, with over a billion people worldwide learning it. In Pakistan, it holds official status alongside the national language, Urdu. Students in the country start learning English from a young age and it is used as a medium of instruction in educational institutes. However, despite this, many learners struggle with all aspects of the language, including reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Writing is an essential skill in Pakistan, both academically and for official communication. Unfortunately, many learners lack proficiency and feel anxious about writing. This study aims to explore writing anxiety among Sindhi undergraduate ESL learners, who speak Sindhi as their first language and live in the Sindh province of Pakistan. The unique features of their first language and cultural differences make this an interesting topic to explore. The results of this study will help educators develop targeted strategies and support mechanisms to help Sindhi ESL learners cope with writing anxiety.

Objectives of the study

- i. To assess the level of writing anxiety in Sindhi undergraduate ESL learners when writing in English.
- ii. To measure level of writing anxiety among Sindhi undergraduate ESL learners while writing in English.
- iii. To determine the type of writing anxiety experienced by Sindhi undergraduate ESL students while writing in English.
- iv. To determine if there is a difference in writing anxiety between male and female Sindhi undergraduates who are ESL learners.
- v. To investigate coping strategies for Sindhi undergraduate ESL learners' anxiety when writing in English.

Research questions

- i. Do Sindhi undergraduate ESL learners experience high, moderate, or low levels of writing anxiety when writing in English?
- ii. Specifically, do they experience somatic, cognitive, or avoidance behavior?
- iii. Do Sindhi female and male differ in terms of writing anxiety?
- iv. What are the strategies that assist Sindhi undergraduate ESL learners in coping their anxiety while writing in English?

Hypothesis

If Sindhi ESL undergraduates write in English, they encounter varying levels and types of anxiety.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Horwitz et al. (1986) defines anxiety as a personal feeling of tension, nervousness, apprehension, and worry that arises due to the arousal of the automatic nervous system. When it comes to second language learning, Gardner (1994) describes anxiety as a feeling of tension and apprehension that is particularly associated with speaking, listening, and writing. This can pose a significant challenge for both teachers and learners during the process of second language acquisition, as they work hard to overcome this obstacle (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). Researchers have attempted to establish a connection between oral and writing anxiety. While Hassan (2001) found no link between the two, Cheng et al. (1999) discovered similarities between speech and writing anxiety. Leki (1999) contends that despite having time to think while writing, some learners still find it quite challenging. Writing anxiety, as defined by Daly (1978) pertains to people's general tendencies to approach or avoid situations that require writing, accompanied by some level of evaluation. High levels of anxiety can even lead individuals to choose a major, course, or career that does not entail writing (Daly & Wilson, 1983). Additionally, learners with high anxiety tend to write shorter essays (Faigley, et al., 1981).

It was also established that all 20 participants made errors while writing which is a bit alarming for an undergraduate level student. The causes behind this finding are either failure of our schooling system in which students' abilities are tested by their memorizing capability rather than their intellect & skills. On the other hand, students are also responsible for their errors, negligence of the importance of writing skills & lack of self-learning capabilities are also root foundations of these findings. The awareness of the importance of writing skills is mandatory (Hamza, M, Roomana, K, Abbasi, A. M, 2017). A study was conducted which discovered that grammar translation method is more effective in comparison to communicative language teacher method in ESL classroom for all four skills Masood, A. M, Abbasi A. M & Umrani, T. (2016).

According to Soomro et al (2019), Pakistani undergraduates face several barriers that hinder their oral presentation skills. These barriers include peer pressure, low confidence, anxiety, hesitation, low motivation, inferiority complex, lack of interest, poor educational background, lack of environment, unfamiliar audience, English language as a barrier, lack of vocabulary and knowledge. Consequently, the presence of these barriers affects undergraduates' performance.

According to Abbasi, A. M, Channa, M. A. (2020), the significant techniques for university students in Pakistan are the phonetic and cognitive aspects of communication skills. These skills include pronunciation, grammar, listening, and reading skills. According to Abbasi (2011), the teaching strategy survey shows that teachers who apply more advanced strategies achieve more effective results. This highlights the need for teacher-training programs to equip ESL

teachers with the latest teaching methods. The updated methods and approaches applied in ESL classrooms for communicative competence can ultimately affect the performance of ESL learners.

Memon et al. (2023) conducted a study at an elite secondary institute, that the Vocabulary Acquisition (VA) was taught through Content & Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in comparison to conventional language teaching of EFL units. This highlights language teaching through content, where learners are taught science, geography, history, or physics with a special focus on language structures simultaneously. The study revealed that learners taught through CLIL units achieved greater Vocabulary Acquisition than the EFL learners of the target language. According to Suhag et al. (2017), teachers tend to rely on traditional teaching methods and textbooks while neglecting project-based learning, group discussions, and other activities. The study recommends that teachers should adopt multiple teaching methods that are appropriate for the content and encourage student participation in the classroom.

According to Lashari et al. (2018), the study indicates that students are primarily motivated by extrinsic factors to learn the target language. The dominant extrinsic factors identified among the students were to obtain a good job and to pass exams. Intrinsic factors, such as developing self-image and communication skills in English with proficiency in daily routine work, were also found to be responsible for motivating students to learn the English language.

Abbasi, A. M., Ahmed, S. R., Farooqi, A., & John, S. (2019) argue that the high proficiency and pronunciation levels of English language teachers can increase the speech anxiety levels of new students. Although it is natural to feel nervous while speaking English as a second language, Pakistani English language speakers should try to speak without anxiety. To manage speech anxiety, students should welcome it and try to overcome it by being natural in their English speech, rather than through mindless imitation. Abbasi, A. M., Khalil, A., & John, S. (2019) found that the academic anxiety has a negative impact on the performance of ESL learners. However, moderate levels of anxiety can help them perform well in academics and keep them motivated. Social anxiety is a key variable that prevents ESL learners from being competent enough in their academics, which then has a greater impact on their results.

The Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) is a tool developed by Cheng (2004) to measure writing anxiety in second language learners. This study utilizes the inventory as it encompasses the relevant sub-categories of somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, and avoidance behavior. Somatic anxiety pertains to the physical manifestations of anxiety, such as tension and nervousness (Cheng, 2004). The term "cognitive anxiety" refers to the mental aspects of anxiety, including negative expectations, fixation on performance, and concerns about perception (Cheng, 2004). Avoidance behavior encompasses the behavioral component of anxiety, such as avoiding writing tasks (Cheng, 2004). Recent research on second language writing anxiety, such as Kara's (2013) study on students at Anadolu University, has shown that learners struggle with writing anxiety due to lack of writing experience and habit, resulting in difficulty in expressing themselves in writing.

A study by Zhang (2011) looked into writing anxiety in Chinese English majors. The results from SALWAI showed that these students have high levels of ESL writing anxiety, with Cognitive Anxiety being the most common type. Jebreil et al. (2015) also found high levels of cognitive anxiety in Iranian EFL learners with different proficiency levels. Similarly, Elif and Yayli (2019) discovered writing anxiety among Turkish school pupils studying English as a second language, with the highest levels of somatic anxiety. Dar and Khan (2015) used Cheng's (2004) SALWAI instrument to investigate writing anxiety in Pakistani ESL students in both public and private sector institutes, revealing a moderate level of anxiety. This study aims to explore writing anxiety in Sindhi undergraduate ESL learners in Pakistan.

METHODS

Participants

The present research involves students from the English Language and Literature department at 20 SMI university. Out of the 20 participants, 9 are female and 11 are male. They were selected randomly from different semesters of the English department, including one from the first semester, two from the second semester, three from the third semester, three from the fourth semester, five from the fifth semester, and six from the sixth semester. The age range of the participants was between 18 and 22 years old, and they all spoke Sindhi as their native language.

Data collection tool

For this study, two questionnaires were used. The first questionnaire was the 22-item Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) by Cheng (2004) – Original Version. Its purpose is to measure the level of anxiety experienced by student writers when writing in English. The SLWAI has three sub-dimensions: somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, and avoidance behavior. The questionnaire uses a 5-choice response design with the options of strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, and strongly agree. The items are divided into three subcategories: cognitive anxiety (items 1, 3, 7, 9, 14, 17, 20, 21), somatic anxiety (items 2, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15, 19), and avoidance behavior (items 4, 5, 10, 12, 16, 18, 22). The questionnaire was administered in English because the participants were English Language and Literature students, and any unclear points were clarified during the process. The second questionnaire was open-ended and consisted of one question: what strategies do you use to cope with your writing anxiety? This question was included to determine the most common ways Sindhi ESL learners cope with their apprehension when writing in English.

Procedure of scoring

The study utilized Zhang's (2011) scoring method to assess anxiety levels. This method categorizes scores as follows: scores above 65 indicate high levels of anxiety, scores below 50 indicate low levels of anxiety, and scores between 50 and 65 indicate moderate levels of anxiety. To implement this method, the

researcher manually calculated the scores for each participant and marked each response as high, moderate, or low level of anxiety based on Zhang's (2011) scoring system. Similarly, the researcher manually calculated scores for each participant to measure cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior, and then separately averaged the scores for each type of anxiety. The type of anxiety with the highest average score was considered the most prevalent among the participants. Additionally, the researcher compared the average scores of males and females to compare the prevalence of each type of anxiety between the genders.

RESULTS

The study analyzed data from two questionnaires to present the levels and types of writing anxiety, as well as coping strategies, among Sindhi undergraduate ESL learners.

Levels of SLWA among Sindhi undergraduate ESL learners

Research question

Do Sindhi undergraduate ESL learners experience high, moderate, or low levels of writing anxiety when writing in English?

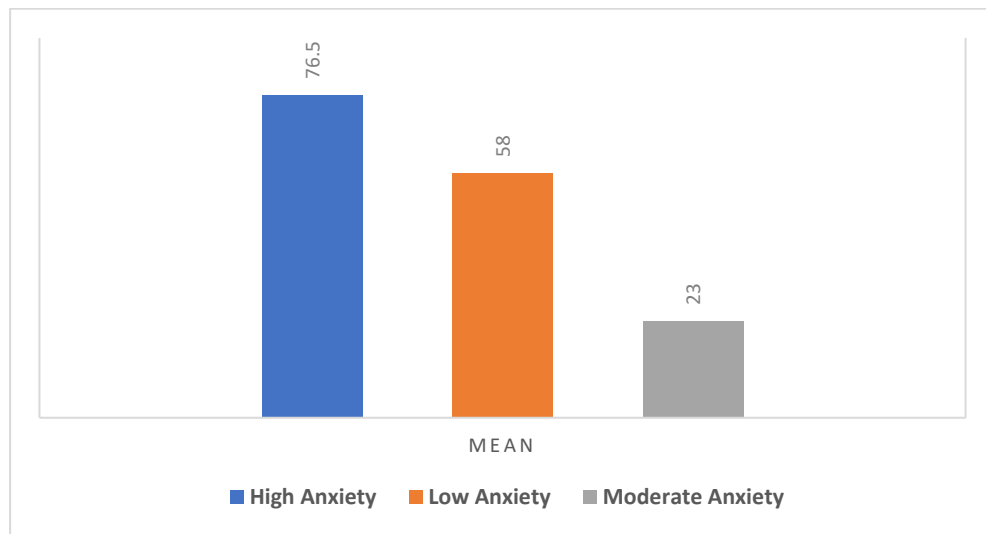
To address the initial research question, the SLWA levels of Sindhi ESL students at the undergraduate level were assessed using the SLWAI questionnaire developed by Cheng (2004). Based on Zhang's (2011) categorization, mean scores above 65 were classified as high level, scores below 50 as low level, and scores between 50 and 65 were considered moderate levels of anxiety.

In this study, participants' scores on the SLWAI ranged from 22 to 110, and the mean score was 66, indicating a high level of anxiety. Out of the 20 students, 14 had a high level of anxiety, 5 had a moderate level, and only 1 had a low level of anxiety when it came to writing in their second language. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics of anxiety levels among Sindhi ESL learners, while Figure 1 visually represents the levels of anxiety.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of levels of writing anxiety (General)

	Number	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Total	20	46	86	66
High Anxiety	14	67	86	76.5
Low Anxiety	5	52	64	58
Moderate Anxiety	1	46	0	23

Figure. 1. Levels of SLWA among Sindhi ESL learners



Types of SLWA among Sindhi ESL learners

Research question

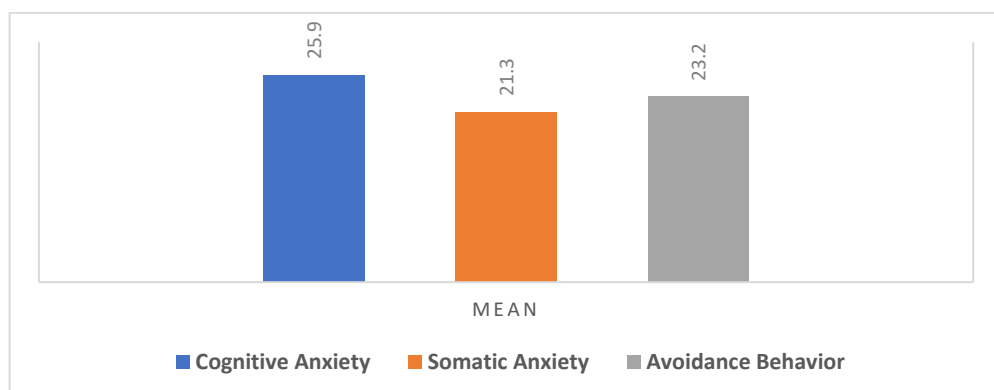
Specifically, do they experience somatic, cognitive, or avoidance behavior?

Cheng (2004) identified three types of anxiety experienced by language learners: Somatic Anxiety, Cognitive Anxiety, and Avoidance Anxiety. Table 2 and Figure 2 depict how these types of anxiety are distributed in ESL writing based on the scores of corresponding items. For Sindhi ESL undergraduate students, the most prevalent form of anxiety associated with writing in their second language is Cognitive Anxiety.

Table. 2. Descriptive statistics of types of SLWA

Types of SLWA	Total	Mean
Cognitive Anxiety	518	25.9
Somatic Anxiety	426	21.3
Avoidance Behavior	465	23.2

Figure. 2. Types of SLWA



SLWA among genders

Research Question III

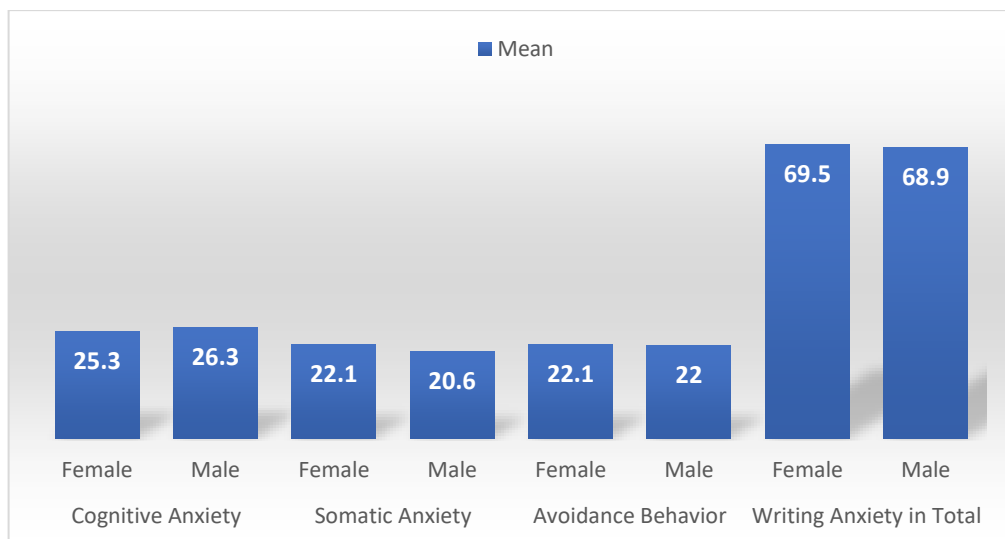
Do Sindhi female and male differ in terms of writing anxiety?

In this section, we analyze the writing anxiety and its sub-components among male and female students. Based on the data presented in Table 3, there are no noteworthy differences in cognitive anxiety, avoidance behavior, and overall writing anxiety between males and females. However, a significant difference was found in somatic anxiety, with female students reporting higher levels of somatic anxiety. Figure 3 and Table 3 demonstrate a comparative analysis of Sindhi male and female students in terms of SLWA.

Table. 3. Descriptive statistics of SLWA among genders

Writing Anxiety	Gender	Mean
Cognitive Anxiety	Female	25.3
	Male	26.3
Somatic Anxiety	Female	22.1
	Male	20.6
Avoidance Behavior	Female	22.1
	Male	22
Writing Anxiety in Total	Female	69.5
	Male	68.9

Figure. 3. SLWA among Sindhi females and males



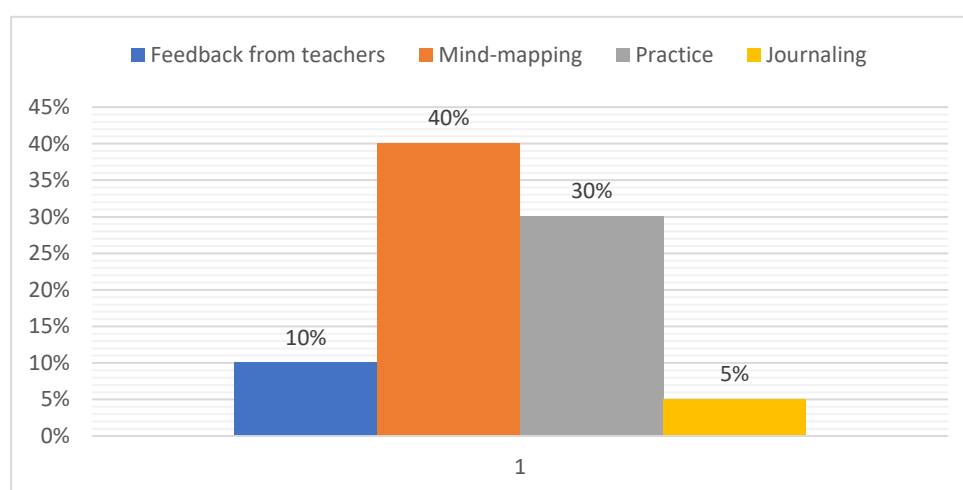
Strategies to cope with SLWA

Research Question

What are the strategies that assists Sindhi undergraduate ESL learners in coping their anxiety while writing in English?

The results reveal that Sindhi learners most commonly use mind mapping to cope with their writing anxiety while writing in English. However, some learners answered that practicing writing or journaling in English daily also helps them cope with their writing anxiety. Others answered that they take feedbacks from their teachers or family members regarding their write-ups. This helps them know about their mistakes which in turn assists them cope with their writing anxiety. Figure.4 illustrates strategies commonly used by Sindhi learners to cope with their writing anxiety.

Figure. 4. Strategies used by Sindhi ESL learners to cope with SLWA



DISCUSSION

The main objective of this research was to examine the degree and types of writing apprehension experienced by undergraduate Sindhi students learning English as a second language. The results indicated that these learners have high levels of anxiety when writing in English. Out of the 20 participants, 14 reported high anxiety, 5 had moderate levels, and only one student experienced low levels of anxiety while writing in English. Furthermore, the study discovered that cognitive anxiety is the most common form of writing apprehension experienced by Sindhi ESL learners. The difference in structure between Sindhi and English may lead to confusion among learners, resulting in excessive cognitive processing and anxiety when writing in English. Additionally, the study looked at the difference in writing anxiety between male and female participants. It is commonly believed that male students experience more anxiety than females do. Some researchers found that female learners feel less anxious than males, while others found the opposite (Pappamihiel, 2002). The findings of this research revealed that there was no significant difference in cognitive anxiety, avoidance behavior, and overall writing anxiety between male and female participants. However, female Sindhi students experienced more somatic anxiety than males when writing in English. The study found that most of the learners coped with their writing anxiety by using mind-mapping strategies, receiving feedback from their teachers, and practicing journaling. In conclusion, this study highlights the high levels of writing anxiety experienced by Sindhi ESL learners and identifies cognitive anxiety as the most common form of apprehension among them. Moreover, it provides insights into the

gender differences in writing anxiety and suggests effective coping strategies to alleviate writing anxiety among ESL learners.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the extent and nature of writing anxiety among undergraduate Sindhi ESL learners when writing in English. The results indicate that these learners experience significant levels of writing anxiety, with cognitive anxiety being the most common type experienced. However, female Sindhi ESL learners tend to experience more somatic anxiety than their male counterparts. These findings are concerning, and English language teachers should encourage and provide constructive feedback to help reduce learners' anxiety levels.

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APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE I

Direction: Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of these statements regarding writing anxiety. Place a “✓” mark in the box of your answer.

There are five levels of agreement:

5 – Strongly Agree 4 – Agree 3 – Undecided 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly Disagree

S.No.	Statements	5 (SA)	4 (A)	3 (U)	2 (D)	1 (SD)
1.	While writing in English, I am not nervous at all.					
2.	I feel my heart pounding when I write English compositions under time constraint.					
3.	While writing English compositions, I feel worried and uneasy if I know they will be evaluated.					
4.	I often choose to write down my thoughts in English.					
5.	I usually do my best to avoid writing English compositions.					
6.	My mind often goes blank when I start to work on an English composition.					
7.	I don't worry that my English compositions are a lot worse than others.					
8.	I tremble or perspire when I write English compositions under time pressure.					
9.	If my English composition is to be evaluated, I would worry about getting a very poor grade.					
10.	I do my best to avoid situations in which I have to write in English.					
11.	My thoughts become jumbled when I write English compositions under time constraint.					
12.	Unless I have no choice, I would not use English to write compositions.					
13.	I often feel fear when I write English compositions under time.					
14.	I am afraid that the other students would laugh at my English composition if they read it.					
15.	I freeze up when unexpectedly asked to write English compositions.					
16.	I would do my best to excuse myself if asked to write English compositions.					
17.	I don't worry at all about what other people would think of my English compositions.					
18.	I usually seek every possible chance to write English compositions outside of class.					

19.	I usually feel my whole body rigid and tense when I write English compositions.					
20.	I am afraid of my English composition being chosen as a sample for discussion in class.					
21.	I am not afraid at all that my English compositions would be rated as very poor.					
22.	Whenever possible, I would use English to write compositions .					

APPENDIX II

QUESTIONNAIRE II

The question in this section is an open-ended question. You can answer it in a sentence, bullet points or in a paragraph form but make sure to keep it short and simple.

Q) What strategies do you follow to cope with your writing anxiety?

ANS: