The Relationship of EFL Writing Achievement with Test Anxiety and Writing Anxiety

التحصيل الكتابي في الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية وعلاقته بالقلق من الامتحان و القلق نحو الكتابة

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to investigate whether EFL fourth year middle school learners' writing achievement in Algeria correlate with test anxiety and writing anxiety. The sample of this study includes: 65 learners and their two teachers of the English subject at July 5th Middle School, Bougaa, Setif. A triangulation research method was adopted through a questionnaire for learners, an interview for the teachers and the learners' exam grades of the English subject for the second term. Findings revealed a positive relationship between test anxiety and learners' writing scores. Conversely, a trivial negative correlation between writing anxiety and learners' writing scores was reported. To sum up, test anxiety is facilitative, enabling learners to achieve higher in writing tasks during exams.

Keywords: EFL Writing Achievement; Test Anxiety; Writing Anxiety.

ملخص:

الهدف من هده الدراسة هو تقصي علاقة التحصيل الكتابي لمتعلمي الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية في السنة الرابعة متوسط في الجزائر مع القلق من الامتحان و القلق نحو الكتابة. تتكون العينة من 65 تلميذا و أستاذيهم في متوسطة 5 جويلية 1962 ببوقاعة, سطيف.

اعتمد على تصميم تثليثي للبحث من خلال استبيان للمتعلمين, استجواب للأساتذة و نقاط اختبار الانجليزية للفصل الثاني. تشير النتائج الى علاقة ايجابية بين القلق من الامتحان و نقاط المتعلمين في التعبير الكتابي بينما توجد علاقة سلبية ضئيلة بين نقاط المتعلمين الكتابية و القلق نحو الكتابة. في الأخير, القلق من الامتحان هو تيسيري يمكن التلاميذ من التحصيل بكثرة في تمارين الكتابة في الامتحانات

كلمات مفتاحية: التحصيل الكتابي في الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية ، القلق من الامتحان ، القلق نحو الكتابة.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning a foreign language necessitate the consideration of the communicative competence which can be categorized into speaking and writing (Brown, 2000). Writing is an active, productive language skill, and essential in academic success especially in EFL contexts (Erkan & Saban, 2011). Similarly, the second move of educational reformations that have been launched in Algeria since 2015 have brought changes to all subjects at all levels, leading to a second generation of textbooks. The English subject was affected by these changes at the middle school level. Drawing upon the previous reforms, learning objectives identify three types of competencies in language learning, interactive, interpretive, and productive. The productive competency is the ability to express meaning and knowledge in speaking and writing (Ministry of National Education, 2018).

The acquisition of the writing competency at the middle school level commences from writing a single word, to a sentence, then to a paragraph before having the Brevet Exam. Thus, learners at the fourth year are required to write paragraphs in order to serve different communicative purposes such as arguing, narrating, and describing. (Tamrabet, et al, 2019). In addition, Benadla (2012) stated, "As far as the middle school is concerned, since their first year middle school, the learners study EFL three times a week with a specialised teacher in EFL. They take two tests and one exam each trimester, that is, to say three times a year." (p. 146).

Observation and review of the fourth year middle school learners' examination grades of the English subject tend to be unsatisfactory regarding learners and teachers' expectations. Written expression may be one of the dominant sources of the low scoring in the English subject exams. Accordingly, the analysis of the exam papers of those pupils reveal that they tend to obtain low grades in the writing section, which is about thirty percent (30 %) of the final exam grade.

It may be necessary to understand factors accounting for EFL learners' written expression scores in the exams. Foreign language writing achievement tends to be subject to different factors either to affective ones, or to the context of

writing. Learners' attitudes and perceptions towards writing differ in which they may be anxious and worried towards writing in English, or they may not. This fear and anxiety can be labelled as writing anxiety (W.A) (Hassan, 2001). EFL WA may commence at early stages of language learning especially for elementary and middle school learners (Wiltse, 2001). Besides, learners write paragraphs in a section within a general English examination. Learners, then, may reveal test anxiety (T.A) which would interfere on their writing performance. In addition, TA among young EFL learners tend to be highly correlated with formal English exam achievement comprising writing productions (Aydin, 2013).

The aim of this study, then, is to identify the relationship between EFL learners' writing achievement, test anxiety and writing anxiety. In other words, it explores whether EFL learners' writing scores in the English subject exams are negatively or positively correlated with their test anxiety and writing anxiety. In this way, two research questions stem from these aims:

1. What is the relationship between EFL learners' Writing Scores and test anxiety?
2. What is the relationship between EFL learners' Writing Scores and writing anxiety?

2. Literature Review
2.1 Test Anxiety

TA tends to be distinguished from the feeling of foreign language anxiety. It is a psychological trouble including an excess of frustration, worry about the future as well as fear of negative evaluation during or in the preparation of test or evaluative situation (Goonan, 2003). Moreover, Dusek (1980) defined test anxiety as: " an unpleasant feeling or emotional state that has physiological and behavioral concomitants and that is experienced in formal testing or other evaluative situations" (p. 88). That is, Morris and Liebert distinguished two main components of test anxiety: worry and emotionality. First, they explained worry components as negative expectations and self-related negative thoughts (as cited in Doctor & Altman, 1969). Worry component, then, tends to be a cognitive component which is associated with poor performance in evaluative situations. The latter is a result of fear of failure, subjective comparison with peers, and deficiency of self-confidence (Sapp, 1999); second , emotionality component refers to the physiological reactions

and responses caused by testing situations namely fast heartbeat, dry mouth, tense muscles, nervousness, and tension (Schwarzer, 1980)..

2.2 Writing Anxiety

WA as part of foreign language anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994) was originally identified by Daly and Miller (1975) in first language contexts. Besides, Hassan (2001) defined foreign language WA, "a general avoidance of writing and of situations perceived by the individuals to potentially require some amount of writing accompanied by the potential for evaluation of that writing."(p. 4). Moreover, Cheng (2004) described second language WA as corresponding to three components of anxiety such as somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, and avoidance behavior. First, somatic anxiety is the same as emotionality component of test anxiety. Second, cognitive anxiety corresponds to worry component. In addition, avoidance behavior is the attitudinal aspect of the anxiety experience of writing as well as the avoidance of writing. In this way, avoidance behavior of writing is confined to debilitative anxiety which directs learners towards skipping the writing task.

2.3 Writing Test Anxiety

Writing as part of communicative competence is relatively correlated with foreign language anxiety and specifically with WA and TA (Haskin, Smith, & Racine, 2003). The concept of "Writing Test Anxiety" was addressed by Negari and Rezaabadi who affirmed that writing TA is not necessarily WA (2012). They explained that writing test anxiety occurs when EFL learners compose in actual testing situations of the writing skill. For Negari and Rezaabadi, both WA and TA are correlated with the EFL learners' writing performance, and they contended that writing test anxiety is bi-dimensional including TA and WA.

Daud, Daud, and Abu Kassim (2005) attempted to understand whether WA is a cause or an effect by testing the deficit model in order to determine the factors associated with the low writing performance of 186 EFL Malaysian learners. They concluded that students seemed to be highly apprehensive due to the deficiency in some language aspects related to the writing skill such as vocabulary and language use. In this study, the deficit study skill model was confirmed.

Study skills deficit model was mainly related to TA as well as test

performance (Sapp, 1999), yet Daud, et al. (2005) might rely and base their study on Hill and Wigfield (1984) assumption in which they affirmed that deficit hypothesis may not seem to be directly related to test anxiety. From this perspective, Daud at al. (2005) may have built their perception on (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986) who contended that foreign language anxiety includes three components in terms of communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety.

However, there may be a negative correlation between WA and foreign language writing performance due to the cognitive components of anxiety rather than somatic or avoidance components (Cheng, 2004). Therefore, ESL or EFL apprehensive writers are likely to be more anxious on writing tasks in the target language examinations (Murray & Madsen, 1984), that is, EFL learners who are anxious towards writing tasks do not obtain good grades in tests of writing compositions (Lee, 2002). In addition, Lee & Krashen (2002) reported a correlation between Taiwanese EFL students' writing apprehension and the grades they obtained from an optional English writing course.

In EFL contexts, Aydin (2013) investigated TA among 477 children and young adolescent Turkish learners from five elementary schools using Test Anxiety Scale (T.A.S). He reported that TA was the main factor contributing in learners' low performance in examinations. However, Hall (1991) attempted to investigate the students' writing proficiency in tests and non-testing situations. He concluded that TA might have a facilitative effect in writing examinations. Accordingly, Negari and Rezaabadi (2012) argued that anxious students are likely to perform better in writing tests than low apprehensive ones

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

This study used a triangulation research method that consists of quantitative and qualitative research tools in terms of a questionnaire and an interview. This research method is characterized by collecting as well as analysing both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. In addition, the findings obtained from the collected data were compared in order to respond the research questions.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The population of the study were EFL fourth year pupils at July 5th Middle School, Bougaa, Setif, Algeria. It comprised three classes including 95 learners who are taught by two teachers.

The sample of the population was pupils from two classes whose learners were taught by two female teachers, aged 40 and 45. These classes included 66 pupils, who were aged between fifteen and sixteen (15-16) years. They can be divided into 31 males and 35 females. Finally, the sampling procedure, then, is deliberate sampling or what is known as purposive sampling.

3.3 Questionnaire

The questionnaire collected purely quantitative data within a five-points Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". It included 20 items which were distributed into two sets according to the variables provided in the research questions which are test anxiety (TA) and writing anxiety (WA). This questionnaire was translated into Arabic, the native language of participants since their proficiency levels might hinder their comprehension of some items.

The set of items corresponding to TA was an attempt to include the writing skill as well as the writing section of the exam within the general feeling of anxiety as in items three (3) and six (6). Besides, it includes negative statements in the first item. Therefore, its analysis was performed in the reversing directions since the Likert scale is from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". In addition, it contains item two (2) which is corresponding to the interference model. The latter indicates that TA interferes even when the task is relatively easy (Sarason, 1984).

Besides, worry and emotionality components of TA can be perceived in this questionnaire. Worry components is viewed in items nine (9) and seven (7). The latter was explained as the negative expectations and anticipation of failure. For emotionality components of test anxiety, it can be found in item eight (8). Whereas, items four (4) and five (5) are related to the examinations circumstances as in Bushnell's (1978) research when he reported in his analysis that examination environments may intervene in test anxiety.

The set of the items corresponding to WA is an attempt to tackle the different components of WA as they were provided by Cheng (2004). Cognitive components of WA were indicated by items 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, and 9. For somatic components of WA which can be manifested in physical symptoms or physiological responses stemming from WA, one item (7), and avoidance behaviour of writing item (1). This selection of items is according to Cheng (2004)

who asserted that WA is cognitive rather than somatic anxiety or avoidance behaviour.

Furthermore, item six (6) corresponds to perfectionism, that is, learners may attempt to write a perfect composition from the first draft the fact that promotes their anxiety. Moreover, items eight (8) and item ten (10) indicating negative experiences and negatives expectations respectively as in Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert (1999) study. Finally, item eleven (11) was selected according to the findings of Atay and Kurt (2006) who affirmed that the writing environment would also promote EFL learners' WA.

3.4 Indices of Writing Achievement

The participants' grades of the writing section, situation of integration, in the second term exam of the English subject were reported as indices of writing achievement in this research. Besides, the participants' grades of the second term exam were also included in this study as numerical data.

3.5 Interview

This research consists of a qualitative research tool which is a semi-structured interview. The latter was administered to the teachers. It includes 26 questions which solicit responses about the profile of the teachers, teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards the problem stated in the study, and the variables included in the research questions from the teachers' perspective. In order to establish confidentiality, these interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants after granting non-disclosure of their statements

3.6 Data Analysis Procedure

There were two methods of analysis depending on the data collected. For the quantitative data, the questionnaires' items in each category, TA and WA, were computed as one variable, and these numerical data were analysed using inferential statistics. The latter adopted in the study included analysing correlations between participants' writing grades, Test Anxiety and Writing Anxiety using Pearson Product Moment Coefficient of Correlation "r". These were realized via the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (S.P.S.S 24.0).

For the qualitative data, the data collected from the interviews' scripts were coded into categories. The latter were revealed according to their consistency and to the different responses even they were contradictory.

4. Findings

4.1 Relationship between Writing Achievement and Test Anxiety

Statistical and qualitative analysis revealed consistent results regarding the distinctive types of data collected. In this concern, the first nine items and the TA variable are correlated with the written expression grades through Pearson Coefficient as in the following table.

	written expression grades		
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (bilateral)	N
Written expression grades	1		65
1. I feel confident and relaxed when I take the exam of the English subject.	-,143	,255	65
2. When the exam of English is finished, I realize that I could answer the questions I did not answer.	,174	,165	65
3. During the exam of English, I feel anxious from the administration of the questions until I submit my answer sheet.	-,081	,519	65
4. When I take the exam of English in a noisy and a crowded "classroom, I feel anxious and tense.	,017	,895	65
5. If my friends submit their papers before I do and leave the class, I feel panic	,232**	,046	65
6. During the exam of English, I feel tense and my mind seems to be blank.	-,059	,641	65
7. The teacher's method of correcting the exam is a real trouble for me because I think I am doing well.	,280**	,040	65
8. During the exam of English, my body perspires and I have a dry-mouth.	,015	,906	65
9. Obtaining better marks than my peers is an obligation for me.	,400**	,000	65
Test anxiety	,300**	,001	65

Table1. Correlation between Test Anxiety and Writing Grades

Correlation between the first item in TA and writing grades reveals that there is a little negative correlation (-.143) with no significant p-value (.255). Participants may feel confident about taking the exams of English since the responses were reversed into the negative direction of the confidence, that is, if a participant scores

"disagree", it means that she or he feels confident and agrees with the statement. This can be justified that participants do not demonstrate preconceived notions about tests. Besides, items (3) and (6) corresponding to the interference model indicate little negative correlations (-.081) and (-.059) values which are closer to (.000). Thus, regarding these two items, the participants' feeling of TA does not interfere in the learners' performance.

Though the two components of cognitive interferences as in items (3) and (6) indicate a small negative correlation, another item of cognitive interference of TA indicates a little positive correlation (.147) with writing grades. It is item (2). This item indicates no significant correlation (165). For items corresponding to examination circumstances, items (4) reveals (.017), while, item (5) indicates (.232) which are high positive correlations with a significant p-value (.046). These values do not reveal any correlation. Furthermore, in worry components of TA, item (7) indicates quite positive correlation (.280), with high level of significance (.040). This value indicates that negative expectations related to failure promote learners' writing achievement in exams rather than hindering their performance.

Besides, item (9) which is also related to worry component of TA indicates significant positive correlation (.400) with a p-value (.000). This correlation between item (9) and writing scores reports that comparison with peers does not provoke cognitive test anxiety but rather increases writing achievement. In other words, the increase in competitiveness promotes writing scores; however, the item (8), corresponding to emotionality component, indicates a trivial positive correlation (.015) closer to the (0,000) value. Therefore, there is no significant correlation regarding "emotionality component" of test anxiety.

TA, then, is a facilitative anxiety. The latter may be perceived through considering TA as one variable. Therefore, the correlation between writing grades and TA revealed the value (.300), indicating a significant positive relationship (.001), and participants' writing grades are characterized as being low. In other words, the increase in TA would raise writing scores. Therefore, test anxiety (TA) is a facilitative anxiety. This can be explained with regards to high positive correlations in worry components as well as in the item (5) of examination circumstances.

Similarly, the interviewees asserted that when participants are examined in anxiety situations, they perform well and write more. For instance, in the interviews' scripts, participants demonstrated that the Brevet Exam is regarded as a

high anxiety situation than the ordinary term exam, and learners obtain high grades and write more in the written expression, the situation of integration. Moreover, interference model was prevailing as a category, but participants associated it to negative attitudes towards the English subject. These attitudes can be manifested as well in worry components. In addition, the category of "test performance as context dependent" complies to a large extent with examination circumstances. Overall, TA is facilitative.

4.2 Relationship between Writing Achievement and Writing Anxiety

For the section corresponding to Writing Anxiety, correlations with writing grades were compared and contrasted with categories taken form the interview.

	written expression grades		
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (bilateral)	N
Written expression grades	1		65
1. I do not like English exams especially when they contain the written expression.	-,085	,502	65
2. When I write in the written expression, I feel worried about the mark.	-,132	,296	65
3. Because of time, I feel anxious when solving the written expression.	-,018	,889	65
4. I always compare the grades I obtained in the written expression with those of my peers.	,144	,253	65
5. When I write the written expression in the exam of English, I feel nervous and tense.	-,171	,174	65
6. I do not write more than a draft in the written expression.	,039	,756	65
7. My hand writing becomes worse and my heart pounds when I write in the written expression.	-,076	,548	65
8. I do not bother myself to write the written expression since I used to obtain low grades in it.	-,119	,345	65
9. I have many ideas, but I cannot write them in the written expression.	-,090	,474	65
10. My writing in English is good, but the teacher does not correct fairly my written expression.	-,076	,550	65
11. When I have to write the situation of integration in an annoying and disturbing environment, I cannot write.	-,017	,893	65
Writing anxiety	-,104	,412	65

Table2. Correlation between Writing Anxiety and Writing Scores

The set of items in WA are divided into five categories, namely, cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, avoidance behaviour, perfectionism, and writing

environment. The first item, corresponding to avoidance behaviour, indicates very little negative correlation (-.085), which is closer to the value (.000). The answer to the above question is negative regarding avoidance behaviour of writing. In the first item, the little negative correlation indicates that there are some participants who avoid writing.

The cognitive components of WA are the main section of items. The second item indicates a little negative correlation (-.132). The item (3) indicates a trivial negative correlation with writing scores (-.018). In addition, item (4) indicates a quite positive correlation, that is, competitiveness and comparison with peers promote writing achievement. The same as in test anxiety. This reveals a facilitative anxiety. Therefore, there is no significant correlation.

There is a trivial negative correlation between WA variable and writing scores. The coefficient of correlation indicates the value (-.104). The little increase in WA may not deteriorate in a considerable rate the learners' writing scores. This confirms what the interviewees affirmed. They did not address affective variables such as WA in their responses. In contrast, they explained the problem in relation to the content of the syllabus.

In the interview's findings, there was no explicit reference to WA or its components. Teachers contend that learners' writing achievement is confined to learners focusing on content and organization and disregard other aspects of writing. Although writing is integrated with other skills such as listening and been emphasized in the syllabus of fourth year, teachers contended that learners still need reinforcement, motivation, and encouragement in writing.

4.3 Discussion

The correlation between Test Anxiety (TA) and writing scores reports that TA is facilitative. For instance, the increase in the writing achievement is subject to high anxious writing environment as suggested by Negari and Rezaabadi (2012), in that high test anxious learners perform better in writing tests than low anxious ones. Anxiety, then, would be facilitative for EFL learners. Similarly, Hall's (1991) conclusion about the facilitative nature of TA in EFL writing examinations was confirmed in this research.

The current research yielded relatively consistent findings with previous research as in Murray and Madsen (1984) work in which writing tasks in ESL and EFL language exams provoke WA. In addition, the findings of the study

demonstrate that writing anxiety is not negatively correlated with EFL learners' writing scores. On the other hand, Cheng's (2004) findings contradicts with the current study findings. Cheng (2004) asserted that WA negatively correlates with the ESL students. Similarly, the study findings contradict Lee and Krashen's (2002) study who used one-tailed correlation and found high correlation, while, the use of two-tailed Pearson correlation resulted non-significant correlations in both directions, positive and negative. Unlike Lee's (2002) assumptions about EFL learners, WA anxiety does not appear as a debilitating factor despite participants' low writing achievement.

5. CONCLUSION

Writing proficiency tends to be a noticeable element in EFL learning. It is also regarded as an indicator of language achievement. The development of the EFL learners' writing proficiency would be diagnosed through tests and exams at early stages of learning a foreign language as in most elementary and middle schools' curricula. For the population of this study, EFL learners revealed deficiencies related to their writing scores. Thereby, the analyzed findings which are retrieved from correlating the participants' writing achievement to certain variables reveal a set of conclusions.

Little amount of Test Anxiety (TA) promotes EFL young learners' writing scores. TA is facilitative and promotes writing achievement if it is existing with moderate levels. This entails that if learners are examined under a free anxiety environment, they would not achieve better grades in written expression. Thus, the positive correlation between writing scores and TA illustrates the nature of this situation-specific anxiety as a facilitative anxiety.

In evaluative situations, EFL learners' writing achievement is not characterized by high levels of writing anxiety (WA). Besides, collaborative and cooperative guided writing strategies tend to be associated with little WA that learners may experience when they write during examinations. Moreover, reading is associated with WA in a positive direction. Though WA indicates trivial negative correlation with EFL learners' writing scores, the cognitive components of writing do not interfere in the learners' writing achievement.

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