New Insights into Writing Anxiety of EFL Learners: A Context-Specific Qualitative Study

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A r t i c l e   I n f o

A B S T R A C T

Objective: The objective of this study was to explore how Iranian EFL learners conceptualize writing anxiety and to identify the contributing factors and manifestations of this anxiety within the specific cultural and educational context of Iran.

Methods and Materials: The study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews to collect data from 38 Iranian EFL learners of varying ages and proficiency levels. The grounded theory approach was used to analyze the data, following the stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to identify key themes and sub-themes related to writing anxiety.

Findings: The analysis revealed one core category, "EFL Writing Anxiety," under which three main themes were identified: "Physiological Arousal," "Dysfunctional Thoughts," and "Maladaptive Behaviors." The findings indicate that Iranian EFL learners experience significant writing anxiety, influenced by fear of negative evaluation, GPA concerns, cultural emphasis on academic success, and traditional grammar-focused teaching methods. The study also found that cognitive anxiety, driven by high expectations and fear of failure, was the most severe form of anxiety experienced during writing.

Conclusion: The study concludes that writing anxiety among Iranian EFL learners is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon influenced by cultural, educational, and psychological factors. Addressing writing anxiety is essential for effective language instruction, and the findings provide valuable insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers to develop strategies to mitigate writing anxiety and improve writing performance in EFL learners.

Keywords: Foreign Language, Writing Anxiety Constituents, Learner Attitudes

1. Introduction

In recent decades, language researchers and educators have extensively investigated various learner characteristics, particularly affective variables such as attitude, motivation, inhibition, and self-esteem, within the context of second language (L2) acquisition. Among these variables, anxiety has emerged as a focal point for language professionals and researchers (Alrabai, 2015; Kim, 2002; Szyszka, 2017). Recent studies highlight that foreign language anxiety (FLA) manifests differently across various language skills, including speaking, writing, reading, and listening (Chen, 2023). Anxiety is a universal emotion experienced by most individuals at some point in their lives. However, specific situations—such as interpersonal communication—can trigger heightened anxiety (Cheng, 2004; Ohata, 2005). Research on interpersonal communication anxiety has identified distinct syndromes that significantly impact daily functioning. Notably, the study of writing anxiety has emerged as a subset of communication apprehension research, underscoring its significance (Smith, 1982). Despite extensive research on language anxiety and its sources, few studies have explored learners' beliefs regarding the causes of anxiety during writing tasks.

Since the 1970s, investigations into the relationship between writing apprehension and personality traits have validated writing apprehension as a unique form of anxiety, specifically tied to written communication (J. Burgoon & J. L. Hale, 1983; J. K. Burgoon & J. L. Hale, 1983; Daly & Stafford, 1984; Daly & Wilson, 1983). Research on writing anxiety evolved from studies on oral communication anxiety. A pivotal factor analysis study by Cheng et al. (1999) distinguished anxieties associated with different L2 skills, revealing that anxieties related to L2 classroom environments and writing skills were clearly identifiable. Hassan (2001) defines second language writing anxiety (SLWA) as a general avoidance of writing situations, particularly those involving potential evaluation (Cheng et al., 1999). Similarly, Badrasawi et al. (2016) describe writing anxiety in foreign language (FL) classes as negative emotions that disrupt the writing process (Badrasawi et al., 2016). Empirical evidence underscores the significant impact of writing anxiety on writing performance (Cheng, 2004; Cocuk et al., 2016; Horwitz, 2001; Zorbaz, 2015). Writers with elevated anxiety levels often perceive writing as a punitive task, leading them to avoid writing whenever possible (Johnson & VanBrackle, 2012).

In the context of English language education, Iran has emerged as a pivotal hub for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction (Safdari, 2021). Proficiency in English is not merely a desirable skill but an essential asset across diverse academic, professional, and cross-cultural contexts. Within this educational landscape, the ability to write proficiently in English is of paramount importance, serving as a tangible marker of communicative competence and academic achievement. However, Iranian EFL learners face a significant challenge in their journey toward writing proficiency: writing anxiety (Soodmand Afshar & Hamzavi, 2014). This multifaceted phenomenon encompasses emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions, manifesting as unease, apprehension, self-doubt, and avoidance behaviors when confronted with writing tasks. As noted by Tsiriotakis et al. (2017), the deleterious impact of writing anxiety reverberates throughout the language learning process, hindering effective expression (Tsiriotakis et al., 2017). Consequently, there is a growing interest in understanding the constituent components and causes of writing anxiety in EFL contexts (Kara, 2022; Shang, 2013). However, research on this topic in EFL classrooms, particularly in the Iranian context, remains scarce. Therefore, this study investigates the attitudes of Iranian EFL learners, aiming to uncover their perceptions and conceptualizations of writing anxiety to address this gap in the literature.

This study aims to answer the following research question:

How do Iranian EFL learners conceptualize writing anxiety?

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study utilized a qualitative research design, specifically grounded theory, to investigate the conceptualization of writing anxiety among Iranian EFL learners. Grounded theory was chosen due to its strength in generating theory from data, particularly in areas where existing theories may not fully explain the phenomenon under investigation.

The study involved 38 participants, selected through purposive sampling to capture a wide range of experiences and perspectives. The participants were EFL learners enrolled at the Islamic Azad University of Tabriz, Iran. They varied in age, gender, and English language proficiency, ensuring a diverse sample. The inclusion criteria required

that participants be actively engaged in EFL writing tasks as part of their coursework. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 35 years, and their proficiency levels spanned from intermediate to advanced. This diversity was crucial in examining how writing anxiety manifests across different demographic groups within the Iranian EFL context.

The recruitment process involved contacting potential participants through university channels and obtaining informed consent before their inclusion in the study. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to, with assurances of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning that no new themes or categories emerged from the data, indicating that the theory was fully developed.

2.2.   Measures

2.2.1.   Semi-Structured Interview

Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews, which are particularly effective in qualitative research for exploring complex phenomena like writing anxiety. The interview protocol was meticulously developed based on a review of existing literature on language anxiety and writing challenges in EFL contexts. The protocol consisted of 12 open-ended questions, which were designed to probe into the participants' experiences, feelings, and behaviors related to writing in English. These questions were categorized under three main areas: physiological responses, cognitive processes, and behavioral patterns associated with writing anxiety.

Participants had the flexibility to respond in either Farsi or English, allowing them to express their thoughts more freely and accurately. This bilingual approach was important in capturing the full depth of participants' experiences, as language proficiency could influence their ability to articulate their feelings and thoughts. The interviews were conducted online via Google Meet, a platform chosen for its accessibility and reliability, particularly during the period of data collection, which coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. Each interview lasted between 25 and 35 minutes, providing sufficient time for participants to elaborate on their experiences. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, and the recordings were later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

2.3.   Data analysis

The data analysis process followed the principles of grounded theory as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), involving three main stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The constant comparative method was employed throughout the analysis, ensuring that data were continuously compared with emerging categories and themes to refine the theoretical framework.

Open Coding: The first stage of analysis involved open coding, where the transcribed interviews were reviewed line by line to identify significant phrases, ideas, and concepts. This initial coding generated a large number of codes that were then grouped into categories based on their similarities. During this phase, the focus was on breaking down the data into discrete parts and examining them for meanings and patterns related to EFL writing anxiety.

Axial Coding: In the second stage, axial coding, the categories identified during open coding were linked together based on their relationships and interactions. This process involved reassembling the data in new ways to explore the connections between categories. For example, categories related to physiological symptoms (e.g., increased heart rate, sweating) were connected to broader themes such as "Physiological Arousal." Similarly, categories related to thoughts of inadequacy or fear of negative evaluation were grouped under "Dysfunctional Thoughts."

Selective Coding: The final stage, selective coding, involved integrating the identified themes into a coherent theoretical model that explains the phenomenon of EFL writing anxiety among Iranian learners. The core category, "EFL Writing Anxiety," emerged as the central theme, encompassing three interconnected dimensions: physiological arousal, dysfunctional thoughts, and maladaptive behaviors. The selective coding process ensured that all data were accounted for in the final theory, and that the relationships between categories were clearly defined.

The data were managed using NVivo Pro 12 software, which facilitated the organization, coding, and retrieval of data segments. NVivo allowed for the creation of hierarchical nodes (categories) and sub-nodes (sub-categories), which were essential in tracking the development of themes across the large dataset. The software also enabled the researchers to perform advanced queries and generate visual models to represent the relationships between different aspects of writing anxiety.

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Throughout the analysis, efforts were made to maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of the findings with participants to ensure that their experiences were accurately represented. Additionally, peer debriefing with colleagues in the field of language education helped to refine the analysis and enhance the validity of the results.

The analysis culminated in the development of a substantive theory that explicates the interplay of cognitive, physiological, and behavioral factors in the experience of writing anxiety among Iranian EFL learners. This theory not only contributes to the academic understanding of EFL writing anxiety but also provides practical insights for educators and policymakers in addressing this issue within the Iranian context.

3.   Findings and Results

This section presents the themes associated with EFL writing anxiety, illustrated through a diagram (Figure 1) and supported by a descriptive narrative. Direct quotations from interviewees are included to demonstrate the emerging theory.

Figure 1

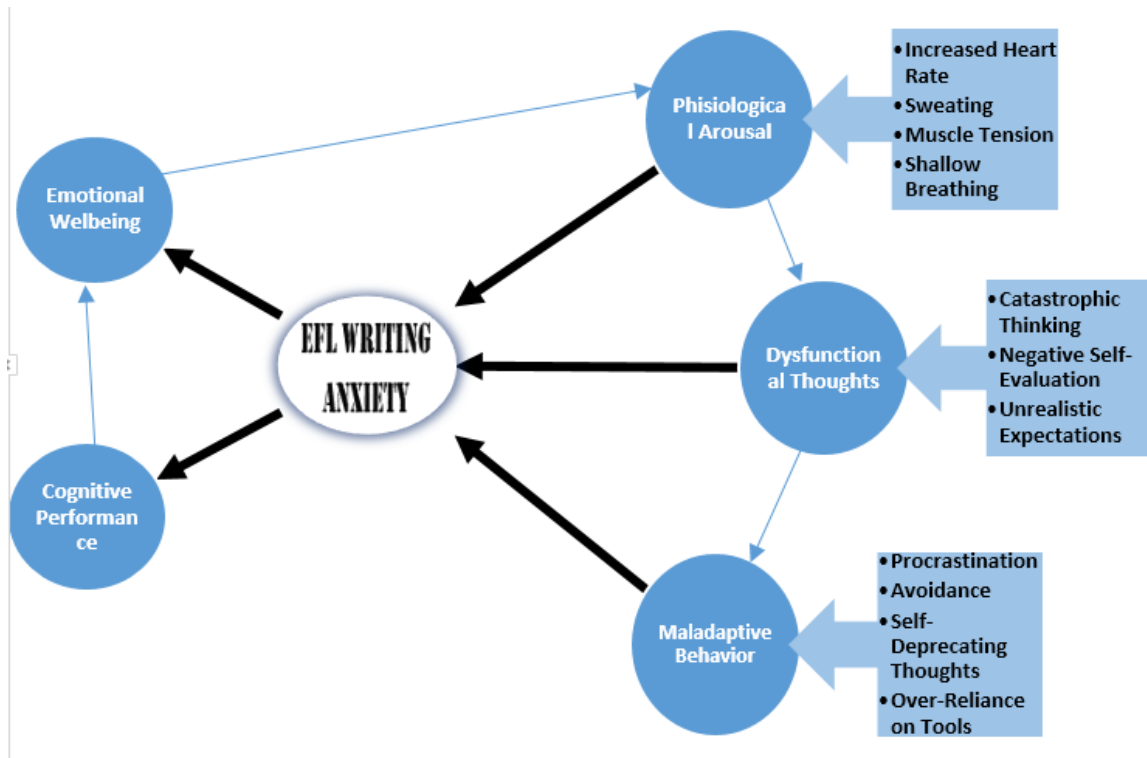*The Emergent Substantive Theory of EFL Writing Anxiety*
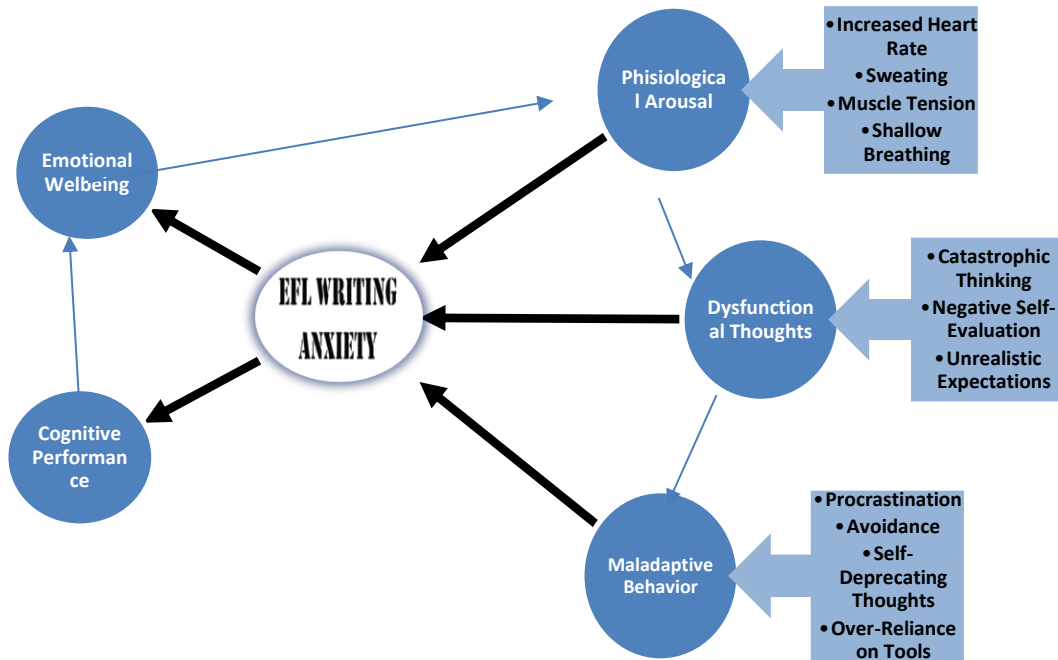
Table 1 displays the frequency data related to the main themes and their associated sub-themes as identified in the emergent theory.

Table 1

Themes and Sub-themes

Main Themes	Sub-themes	Frequency
Physiological Arousal	Increased Heart Rate	42
	Sweating	52
	Muscle Tension	51
	Shallow Breathing	40
Dysfunctional Thoughts	Catastrophic Thinking	64
	Negative Self-Evaluation	39
	Unrealistic Expectations	26
Maladaptive Behaviors	Procrastination	16
	Avoidance	67
	Self-Deprecating Thoughts	39
	Over-Reliance on Tools	26

As evidenced in the analysis, one core category emerged, titled "EFL Writing Anxiety." Under this central category, three themes were identified: "Physiological Arousal," "Dysfunctional Thoughts," and "Maladaptive Behaviors." Specific sub-themes were subsumed under each main theme. In the following sections, we provide an in-depth examination of these main themes. The core category of the qualitative data analysis—"EFL Writing Anxiety"—is also discussed.

3.1. Physiological Arousal

The physiological aspects of EFL writing anxiety were explored through semi-structured interviews, which revealed a variety of symptoms experienced by participants. These symptoms included confusion, changes in body

temperature, and an increased heart rate. Several participants reported that their minds would go blank, leading to anxiety and difficulty generating ideas. Physical manifestations of this anxiety included coughing, lip-smacking, and nail-biting. Confusion also impacted sentence structure and coherence. Participants described feeling anxious and clueless before beginning to write, with some resorting to creating outlines to manage their anxiety.

For instance, three interviewees (Ali, Neda, and Samar) reported experiencing frequent episodes of mental blankness while writing. Mahdi described his experience of a blank mind, nervousness, and the inability to write, which led to repeating words and engaging in unconscious behaviors like sniffing his nose. He stated:

"I feel anxious and unsure about how to write the essay. I currently have no ideas, and despite thinking about it, I still can't come up with anything."

Neda similarly experienced a blank mind and anxiety that prevented her from generating sufficient ideas. She expressed:

"This is causing me to panic, and I'm unsure about what to write or how to proceed with the essay."

Another respondent, Kaveh, reported various symptoms such as coughing, lip-smacking, nose-sniffing, nail-biting, head-scratching, and paper-tapping due to his mental blankness. Confusion was a symptom shared by Sara, Ali, and Javid. Sara's confusion resulted in illogical, fragmented sentences, as well as long, redundant, and grammatically incorrect sentences. Javid also experienced confusion, leading to an essay with only one unclear and disorderly paragraph. She expressed self-awareness of her situation and deep anxiety. Ali described her pre-writing anxiety as follows:

"I get anxious when I have to start thinking about writing, and I feel clueless about how to write the essay. It seems like I have no ideas at all, and even after thinking for a while, I still can't come up with anything."

Selena noted that her mind would go blank, causing her to repeat words and engage in unconscious behaviors like nose-sniffing. Dina confirmed that her anxiety hindered her ability to generate ideas, making her feel as though her mind was empty while writing. Selena spoke about this issue before beginning her writing:

"When I start writing, I feel slightly anxious, and my thoughts may be a bit jumbled. Therefore, I usually opt to create an outline before proceeding."

After completing her outline, Selena reported feeling more focused and began her formal writing. Physiological anxiety also affected participants' body temperatures, leading to either an increase or decrease in temperature. Kaveh mentioned perspiring while writing and experiencing a burning sensation when nervous or anxious, particularly during writing exams. Conversely, Vahid experienced shivers and reported feeling cold during the think-aloud session. Sara corroborated this experience in her interview:

"I frequently experience chills and a headache when I exert myself to generate ideas while finishing writing course assignments."

Participants also reported experiencing a rapid heartbeat. Kaveh mentioned that her heart would beat quickly when she felt extremely anxious. Javid expressed concern about whether she had written too much or too little, leading to repeated checks of the word count and subsequent panic, which caused her heart to race. When the concept of physiological arousal was explained to participants during the interviews, they all acknowledged experiencing this type of anxiety while writing, though they noted that it was less severe than cognitive anxiety.

Physiological anxiety was evident through changes in body temperature, with some participants experiencing sweating and a burning sensation, while others reported feeling cold and shivering. A rapid heartbeat was also noted, especially during moments of panic about the quantity of writing. Although less severe than cognitive anxiety, physiological arousal was a common experience among participants, aligning with general symptoms of anxiety identified in previous studies. These findings suggest that physiological arousal in EFL learners is not culturally specific, indicating a universal phenomenon.

3.2.   Maladaptive Behaviors

In terms of the behavioral component, most participants reported minimal avoidance behavior throughout the writing process. They did not express disdain for writing in a foreign language, and some even found the process enjoyable. While Kaveh occasionally felt anxious during writing, she also experienced laughter and showed signs of enjoyment. Naseri stated that she did not frequently feel frustrated while writing. Despite occasional stress, Mahdi found the writing process interesting and even exclaimed:

"When I am completing writing course assignments and pushing myself to produce ideas, I often feel cold and develop a headache."

However, not all respondents shared this sentiment. Simin expressed a strong reluctance to write during the

session, aiming to complete the essay as quickly as possible. She revealed that she did not take the time to divide her essay into paragraphs, proofread it, or add more details and examples. In her interview, Simin disclosed her hesitancy to write English compositions in her daily life. In contrast, Naseri practiced English writing outside of tests and assignments, while Mahsa, who experienced less writing anxiety, expressed enthusiasm for practicing English writing, particularly in the field of literature. When the concept of avoidance behavior was introduced during the interviews, Simin, Mahsa, and Sadra acknowledged suffering from it while writing. However, the other participants claimed they hardly experienced it.

3.3. Cognitive Anxiety

Cognitive anxiety was prevalent among participants, with most expressing concerns related to academic performance, such as receiving low grades or negative feedback. For instance, one EFL writer constantly critiqued her writing, fearing low scores and worrying about others' opinions. Another participant differentiated her anxiety levels based on course requirements, indicating higher stress for mandatory courses that impacted her GPA. Two others expressed concerns about effectively conveying their ideas and enhancing their writing quality to avoid criticism. Another student focused on perfecting her grammar, fearing that errors might cause others to dismiss her work. Interestingly, one writer exhibited less cognitive anxiety compared to others.

Sevda, for example, smiled when asked about her concern for writing scores and responded:

"The answer to that question varies. When I write papers for mandatory courses, I tend to be preoccupied with the grades, which can be quite frustrating. This usually makes me feel very anxious. However, when it comes to papers for elective courses, I don't place much importance on the grades, and I don't spend too much time on them."

Sevda confessed that she was mindful of her scores when writing papers for mandatory courses, feeling extremely anxious during the process, as these scores would be included in her GPA. However, for elective courses, Sevda did not spend as much time on her writing and did not feel as nervous because the scores for these courses would not affect her GPA. Sevda's concern was not about the score itself but rather her overall GPA. Nava and Ehsan expressed concerns about receiving negative feedback during the writing process. Nava explained:

"Sometimes, I can't put my feelings into words, and I fear the audience might misunderstand my intended meaning."

Ehsan, on the other hand, struggled to enhance her essay by exploring different ways to convey the same idea. She aimed to diversify her expressions and avoid repetition, as using the same word repeatedly could bore readers. Ehsan mentioned:

"The language I use is too basic. I have been relying on simple words and should aim to incorporate more complex expressions. However, when I am writing, I struggle to find more sophisticated words. Despite this, I am motivated to improve my vocabulary and find more appropriate words to use in my writing."

During the writing session, Nava paid extreme attention to her language choice, grammar, and logical structure. She frequently checked her previous sentences and rewrote some of her phrases due to fear of receiving criticism for her essay. Nushin's cognitive anxiety was mainly related to her fear that others would refuse to read her essays due to simple spelling mistakes. Bella repeatedly reviewed her previous sentences before continuing, focusing on making her essay grammatically perfect. Nushin acknowledged that her sentences might be grammatically incorrect regarding tense, which could further discourage others from reading her work. During the interview, Nushin shared that when she thought her essay would be presented in class, she felt motivated to polish her introductory paragraph so that her classmates would continue reading her essay rather than stop after the introduction.

In comparison to the other participants, Behnam did not experience a significant amount of cognitive anxiety. Although she was not entirely confident about her essay, she did not worry about receiving negative feedback from others. Behnam stated during the interview that she did not consider the issue of scores when writing, and whether her essay would be graded or not did not matter to her. During the interviews, all participants, except for Behnam, admitted to experiencing a significant amount of cognitive anxiety during their writing sessions. They considered it the most severe form of anxiety experienced during writing.

3.4. Theory of EFL Writing Anxiety: The Interplay of Cognitive, Physiological, and Behavioral Factors

1. **Core Category: EFL Writing Anxiety**: Writing anxiety represents the emotional and cognitive challenges that individuals encounter during the writing process. It encompasses a range of interconnected

factors that influence both cognitive performance and emotional well-being (Figure 2).

2. **The Negative Cycle**: The interconnected categories in the writing process create a feedback loop. Physiological arousal triggers dysfunctional thoughts, which, in turn, lead to maladaptive behaviors. The resulting anxiety further impacts cognitive performance and emotional well-being during writing.

3. **Physiological Arousal**: Physiological arousal plays a significant role in writing anxiety. When individuals experience stress and pressure related to writing, their bodies respond in specific ways:

   o **Increased Heart Rate**: The anticipation of writing tasks triggers an elevated heart rate, reflecting the anxiety associated with composing written content.

   o **Sweating**: Anxiety leads to sweating, which can be both uncomfortable and distracting during the writing process.

   o **Muscle Tension**: Tense muscles contribute to physical discomfort, affecting concentration and overall writing performance.

   o **Shallow Breathing**: Anxiety disrupts normal breathing patterns, leading to shallow breaths. Proper oxygen flow is essential for cognitive functioning, and shallow breathing may hinder clarity of thought.

4. **Dysfunctional Thoughts**: Cognitive processes significantly impact writing anxiety. Dysfunctional thought patterns exacerbate the emotional burden:

   o **Catastrophic Thinking**: Individuals anticipate worst-case scenarios related to their writing. Fear of failure, rejection, or inadequacy looms large, hindering creativity and productivity.

   o **Negative Self-Evaluation**: Focusing on perceived weaknesses undermines confidence. Self-criticism and self-doubt can paralyze the writing process.

   o **Unrealistic Expectations**: Setting excessively high standards for one's writing can lead to anxiety. Unrealistic expectations create unnecessary pressure and hinder progress.

5. **Maladaptive Behaviors**: Maladaptive behaviors further intensify writing anxiety. These coping mechanisms often perpetuate the negative cycle:

   o **Procrastination**: Anxiety-driven procrastination involves delaying writing tasks. Fear of not meeting expectations or producing subpar work leads individuals to postpone writing, which only increases anxiety.

   o **Avoidance**: Some individuals actively avoid writing altogether due to anxiety. Avoidance perpetuates the fear and prevents skill development.

   o **Self-Deprecating Thoughts**: Negative self-talk undermines self-confidence. Harsh self-criticism reinforces anxiety and inhibits creativity.

   o **Over-Reliance on Tools**: While tools like dictionaries and translation aids are helpful, excessive dependence on them can hinder independent thinking. Relying solely on tools may prevent individuals from fully engaging with the writing process.

Figure 2

The Feedback Loop Created by the Interconnected Categories of Writing Anxiety
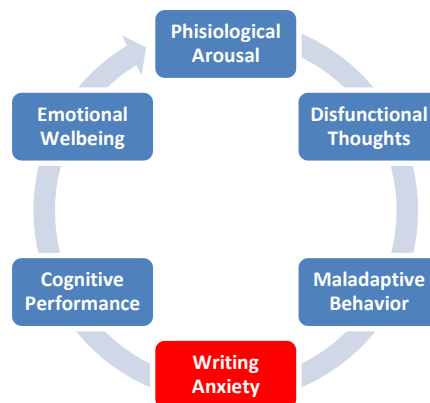
4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how Iranian EFL learners conceptualize writing anxiety. The findings align with previous research, indicating varying levels of avoidance behavior and cognitive anxiety among Iranian EFL learners, suggesting potential cultural distinctions. Iranian learners may face unique challenges, particularly concerning the fear of negative evaluation and concerns related to GPA, which significantly influence their writing behaviors and experiences. While there are similarities with EFL learners outside of Iran, these differences highlight the nuanced nature of cognitive anxiety within Iranian educational contexts.

For instance, the study by Ho (2016) on writing anxiety and self-efficacy beliefs among EFL graduate students in engineering-related fields is consistent with the findings of the current study. Ho identified sources of graduate-level writing anxiety, including insufficient writing skills in English, time constraints, and fear of negative comments—factors also noted in the present research. Ho further found that students with higher writing self-efficacy experienced less apprehension overall (Ho, 2016). Similarly, Jawas (2019) reported a negative impact of anxiety on learners' writing performance, aligning with the current study's results. Jawas also found that among several potentially anxiety-producing factors, in-class essay assignments were the most dominant source of writing anxiety for students (Jawas, 2019).

In agreement with the present study, Malika (2020) found that second-year EFL learners who experienced high levels of writing anxiety could overcome this debilitating anxiety through instructional strategies, thereby improving their academic writing skills (Malika, 2020). Similarly, Brahmi and Touil (2022) concluded that writing anxiety affects students' writing ability, with both students and teachers recognizing it as a primary cause of poor writing performance during exams (Brahmi & Touil, 2022). Furthermore, Rezaei and Jafari (2014) identified cognitive anxiety as the main type of writing anxiety, reflecting concerns about performance, high expectations, fear of negative feedback, low self-confidence, and poor linguistic knowledge, consistent with the findings of the current study (Rezaei & Jafari, 2014).

The study by Sun et al. (2024) also partially aligns with the findings of this research. Sun et al. identified seven primary themes contributing to writing anxiety, including lack of knowledge about the writing topic, inexperience with the genre, difficulties in brainstorming, challenges in structuring information, trouble integrating sources, linguistic difficulties, and receiving negative or no feedback from instructors. Their findings suggest that writing anxiety persists throughout the writing process, indicating that EFL learners need strategies to alleviate anxiety, such as clear instructions, appropriate resources, individualized feedback, and a supportive learning environment (Sun et al., 2024).

A possible explanation for these findings is that in the Iranian context, EFL students often face unique challenges due to cultural and educational factors, including high-stakes environments where writing assignments significantly impact final grades, leading to heightened anxiety. Traditional grammar-focused teaching methods may not adequately prepare students for practical writing tasks, hindering the development of writing skills due to limited exposure to authentic English writing. Additionally, Iranian culture places a strong emphasis on academic success, adding pressure to perform well in writing tasks.

Another justification for the interconnected categories observed in the EFL writing process may be the influence of the Iranian educational system, where high-stakes exams and rigid assessment criteria trigger physiological responses. Furthermore, cultural emphasis on perfectionism and fear of failure may exacerbate negative thought patterns, leading to a cycle of anxiety that affects cognitive performance and emotional well-being during writing. Symptoms such as sweating, muscle tension, and shallow breathing may result from stress during writing assessments. Iranian students' fear of negative evaluation by peers, teachers, and society may also lead to self-criticism, as cultural norms discourage self-promotion, fostering negative self-evaluation. As a coping mechanism, local EFL writers may avoid writing tasks due to fear of inadequacy or making mistakes, developing unrealistic expectations stemming from cultural emphasis on excellence. Over-reliance on dictionaries and translation aids may further hinder their ability to think independently, resulting in negative self-talk that impacts confidence and creativity. Additionally, anxiety-driven procrastination is prevalent, especially when EFL learners face challenging writing assignments.

This study addressed a critical issue in Iranian EFL education: the significant impact of writing anxiety on the writing process. Understanding the contributing factors to EFL writing anxiety is crucial for effective language instruction. The findings of this study hold both theoretical and pedagogical significance, shedding light on the complex

nature of EFL writing anxiety and clarifying potential overlaps and distinctions between writing anxiety and other skill-based anxieties. By thoroughly conceptualizing Iranian EFL writing anxiety, educators, researchers, and policymakers gain valuable insights into the challenges of English writing instruction in Iran.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

Educators must recognize students' writing anxiety and take proactive steps to reduce it, including identifying anxiety-provoking factors. Addressing EFL writing anxiety is pivotal for effective language instruction. Researchers and educators can use the emergent EFL writing anxiety theory to mitigate writing anxiety among EFL learners.

However, this study has several potential limitations that should be addressed in future research. On specific occasions, participants' language proficiency affected their ability to articulate experiences related to writing anxiety. This issue can be addressed by considering participants' language levels and providing support during interviews. Additionally, limited resources impacted the depth and breadth of this qualitative research. Future researchers should be transparent about resource limitations and focus on specific aspects of writing anxiety that can be effectively explored within the available resources.

While similarities exist with EFL learners from other regions, the differences highlighted in this study underscore the nuanced nature of cognitive anxiety in Iranian educational settings. These findings have specific implications for EFL language educators and curriculum developers, emphasizing the need for tailored strategies to address the unique challenges faced by Iranian EFL learners.

Acknowledgments

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

Authors' Contributions

This article is derived from the first author's doctoral dissertation. All authors equally contributed to this article.

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