
Unpacking English Writing Anxiety in Indonesian EFL Learners: A Mixed-Methods Study of Cognitive Strain, Gender, and Academic Level

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Abstract

Background:

Writing anxiety became a tenacious factor hindering EFL students' proficiency, specifically at the higher education level. In the Indonesian context, undergraduate and graduate students face a high demand to complete their studies. Writing a thesis is one of the requirements for graduation at the undergraduate level. Meanwhile, the graduate students must write a research article for publication as another requirement. Those things become a contributing factor to students feeling anxious in writing. A bulk of studies investigated the writing anxiety around the world. However, a few studies examine how gender and academic level differentiate the English language education study program students' writing anxiety in Indonesia. This present study uncovers: 1) types and levels of writing anxiety among the groups, 2) variation of writing anxiety based on gender and academic levels, and 3) reasons affecting writing anxiety.

Methodology:

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was deployed in this study. The sample was 112 students, including 58 undergraduates and 54 graduates, of the English language education study program at a state university in Bengkulu, Indonesia. Two different data collection methods were implemented: an online survey and an on-site focus-group discussion (FGD). The second language writing anxiety inventory (SLWAI) and the second language writing reason inventory (SLWARI) were derived into fifty-eight items of a questionnaire utilized to obtain quantitative data. Meanwhile, the qualitative data were assembled using four main leading questions to probe students' thoughts in identifying the factors contributing to anxiety. Quantitative data analysis was preceded by applying SPSS23, including descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The qualitative data were analyzed through a directed qualitative content analysis (DQCA). Validity and reliability of data were ensured using methodological triangulation.

Findings:

Statistical analysis revealed that the majority of students, 92%, were at a moderate level of writing anxiety. Besides, cognitive anxiety became the first order of anxiety type experienced by the students. Moreover, the statistical findings presented that there is no significant difference in anxiety based on gender and academic level ($\eta^2 < 0.1$). The qualitative analysis elucidated four patterns as contributing factors to the students' writing anxiety, such as: time constraints, lack of ideas and knowledge, teachers' teaching methods, and coursebook complexity.

Conclusion:

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses discovered that cognitive-affective aspects are more challenging for Indonesian students than demographic ones. Moreover, the personal challenges and instructional methods became noteworthy issues that contribute a lot to the emergence of anxiety when writing. Writing teachers need to design engaging and supportive learning environments in their instructional activities, for instance, by adapting a process-oriented writing approach and affording constructive feedback on students' papers. These efforts can reduce students' cognitive loads, thereby enhancing their self-efficacy in writing.

Originality:

The symptom-based SLWAI and the cause-based SLWARI are integrated simultaneously to disclose the writing anxiety experienced by undergraduate and graduate students in the Indonesian context. Additionally, this study implements a mixed-method approach to obtain plentiful, comprehensive data. Accordingly, a more vivid understanding of students' anxiety in writing can be attained.

Keywords : Academic writing, EFL, Indonesian context, writing anxiety

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1. INTRODUCTION

Academic writing skills in English remain an ongoing challenge for Indonesian students studying in English Language Education programs, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Students convey two-fold obligations: while taking on the duty to be English educators, students also have to develop their English academic literacy. These conditions trigger anxiety, such as in writing, and hinder academic improvement ([Kawengian & Subekti, 2023](#); [Shobari et al., 2025](#)). Within this context, proficiency in academic writing is not merely a general requirement but a critical skill tied to students' academic success and professional preparation.

EFL students in the Indonesian context face challenges in the academic writing process, since they have an inadequate chance to use English in their everyday lives. High expectations and limited support became the substantial reasons for them to neglect the use of linguistic conventions appropriately in their writing ([Wahyuni et al., 2019](#); [Shobari et al., 2025](#); [Wahyuni & Umam, 2022](#)). This condition, subsequently, influences the growth of Foreign Language Writing Anxiety (FLWA) among the students, which might decrease writing performance and self-confidence. In addition, mentioned by [Naufina and Putro \(2025\)](#) that FLWA can also be formed by other features, for example, gender and academic level.

FLWA is conceptualized by [Cheng \(2004\)](#) with a Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), as a fear, worry, and nervous feeling perceived by EFL students throughout their writing activities. This inventory consists of three anxiety elements: cognitive, somatic, and avoidance behavior. Several studies found those elements in English language education programs in Indonesia ([Asnas & Hidayanti, 2024](#)). Research conducted by Wahyuni and Umam (2022), revealed that most of the students at the undergraduate level in East Java, Indonesia, experienced cognitive anxiety. In addition, [Kurniasih et al. \(2023\)](#) showed that both

sophomores and juniors EFL Indonesian students faced cognitive anxiety, with other perceptions of their writing as a contributing factor. Meanwhile, avoidance behavior was reported as the most prevalent anxiety experienced by EFL students in West Java ([Sulfiana et al., 2022](#)). Somatic anxiety, although in other studies was commonly discovered to be the lowest among the anxiety types, yet [Arindra \(2020\)](#) proved that EFL students in Yogyakarta felt it more. This condition raises the suspicion that FLWA is not just a theory, but has become something important and deserves attention because it can hinder Indonesian students' academic progress and their professionalism as prospective teachers.

Recent studies discovered three primary dimensions underlying the growth of FLWA. The first concerns cognitive self-assessment, which encompasses learners' self-efficacy, perfectionism, and fear of negative evaluation. When self-confidence in one's own writing abilities is low or possess perfectionist expectations, they are inclined to experience increased cognitive anxiety with a sustained focus on accuracy and anticipation of failure ([Dewaele et al., 2019](#); [Shen et al., 2024](#)). The second deals with instructional and feedback practices. In many cases, inadequate feedback, teacher-centered evaluation, and inadequate training on process-oriented writing strategies abandon students without comprehensible guidance, thus increasing somatic anxiety through nervousness and tension when performing high-stakes writing assignments ([Kadmiry, 2022](#); [Soleimani et al., 2020](#)). The third covers motivational and behavioral regulation. This dimension involves some personal features, such as negative experiences, limited effort strategies in learning, and low motivation. When those features exist, students intend to ignore the writing tasks and ultimately delay the thesis writing progress ([Rabadi & Rabadi, 2020](#); [Rasool et al., 2023](#)). In summary, it can be pointed out that psychological behaviors, motivational sceneries, and instructional circumstances corroborate to the existence of FLWA.

Despite the growing attention to FLWA, several research niches were found. Most of the literature tends to treat EFL learners as a single group, ignoring the unique position of English Language Education students. Students who are registered in the English language education not only have to maintain the development of their English academic knowledge, but also are ready to transfer that knowledge effectively to others as teachers. These conventions differentiate those students from the general EFL groups. Accordingly, it is necessary to investigate students' anxiety within this program. Besides, some findings ([Wahyuni et al., 2019](#); [Naufina & Putro, 2025](#)) encountered the facts that English education students in Indonesia perceived inadequate feedback and cognitive burden, which might cause

anxiety in writing. Furthermore, research still lacks clarity on how these challenges vary among different student groups, especially between undergraduate and graduate students who encounter distinct academic responsibility, research and publication demands, and supervisory dynamics. Findings on gender differences are also inconsistent: some studies report higher anxiety among female students due to cultural and evaluative pressures ([Anthony & Wilang, 2023](#); [Salikin, 2019](#)), whereas others find no significant gender effects ([Hz, 2024](#); [Rasool et al., 2023](#)).

In the Indonesian higher-education context, institutional requirements often intensify students' academic challenges. In the present study context, a state university in Bengkulu enforces academic regulations that require undergraduate students to complete a thesis as a graduation prerequisite, while graduate students must not only complete a thesis but also publish at least one research article ([Peraturan Rektor No 10, 2024](#)). Even though the regulation pursues to reinforce the academic quality, it still demands students to focus more precisely on their writing which ultimately contribute to increased writing anxiety ([Kawengian & Subekti, 2023](#); [Shobari et al., 2025](#); [Ulya et al., 2025](#)). Previous studies conducted in Indonesia disclose that the institutional requirements, along with inadequate feedback and a lack of linguistic understanding, contribute to the affective and cognitive strain during thesis or manuscript preparation ([Nurcholis et al., 2023](#)). In spite of the growing attention to FLWA, few investigations have integrated both its manifestations (i.e., cognitive, somatic, and avoidance) and its sources (i.e., instructional, motivational, and contextual) within a single explanatory framework, particularly in English Education programs in Indonesian universities. To arbitrate this, the present research combines the SLWAI SLWA) ([Cheng, 2004](#)), and SLWARI (Kara, 2013), into a mixed-methods design. Furthermore, it allows for a more tangible investigation into gender and level of academic interaction with the anxiety dimension within English language education programs in Indonesia. The simultaneous use of those two instruments enables a comprehensive examination of both indicators and sources of anxiety. This further strengthens the construct validity and aligns with the two theoretical lenses: self-efficacy [Bandura \(1978\)](#) and writing process theory ([Hyland, 2018](#)).

This present study took place in an English language education program in Indonesia, where students have dual responsibility as learners and future teacher educators of academic writing, which might intensify the anxiety. Moreover, this study compares the two levels of academic: undergraduate and graduate, and gender, to see the possible differences among them. To that end, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What do students in English writing experience the levels and types of anxiety?
2. Do anxiety levels vary by gender and educational level?
3. What factors contribute to students' writing anxiety?

By those foci, the study provides a theoretically and contextually based contribution. Notably, it exemplifies how self-efficacy and process-oriented writing interact to form anxiety in writing among Indonesian students. Finally, it brings practical implications to design the emotionally responsive and pedagogically supportive writing instruction.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, merging quantitative and qualitative methods to grasp a comprehensive knowledge of writing anxiety ([Creswell & Clark, 2018](#)). The quantitative method was implemented at the beginning to examine the type, level, and sources of anxiety. The results of the quantitative data analysis become the basis for determining the respondents in qualitative data collection at the second stage. The respondents were varied based on the anxiety levels, different genders, and academic levels. This implementation aligns with [Ivankova et al. \(2006\)](#) who suggest the use of a qualitative method to expand and clarify the quantitative data. Moreover, it is in line with [Shorten and Smith \(2017\)](#), who stated that the integration of those two methods allows researchers to accomplish both generalization and in-depth insight.

2.2 Subject

The study was carried out at a state university in Bengkulu, Indonesia. The students who registered in the 2024/2025 academic year in both the undergraduate and graduate English language education study programs became the subject of this research. This study applied a voluntary sampling design proposed by [Murairwa \(2015\)](#). First, the researchers decided on the target population by considering the objectives of the research. There are two criteria used to select the population, namely: 1) the completion of an academic writing course, and 2) being currently involved in the academic writing activities, such as writing a thesis proposal, a research article for publication, or essay writing assignments. The total population was 145, consisting of 80 undergraduate and 65 graduate students. The next step was to determine the sample of the research. The calculation was performed using the G*Power software. The results found that 102-108 participants would be required with $f=.25$, $d=.50$ at $\alpha=.05$.

The recruitment of the participants was conducted through a WhatsApp group announcement and during classroom practices taught by the researchers. The students were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they would not get any compensation. Moreover, they could withdraw their participation at any time, and their data would be removed from all research reports. As a result, 77.2% of the total population, 112 of 145 students, participated in this research. The sample consisted of 58 undergraduates, including 28 females and 30 males, and 54 graduates, including 27 females and 27 males. This number was sufficient as it is within the recommended range.

2.3 Instruments and Data Collecting Procedures

The data were collected through two different techniques: a survey and a focus-group discussion. The survey was administered through a Google Form consisting of fifty-eight items. The twenty-seven items were arranged to analyze the type and level of writing anxiety, while the thirty-one items were compiled to examine the factors that caused it. The instrument was taken from [Cheng's \(2004\)](#) SLWAI and [Kara's \(2013\)](#) SLWARI. The validity and reliability of the instrument have been met and reported in their articles. The original instrument deploys a Likert scale with 5 points. However, the present study adapted a 4-point scale: 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree. The adaptation involves the deletion of the point that indicated the "neutral". This decision was taken to reduce the bias and to obtain more conclusive responses. Since the instrument scale was adapted from a 5-point to a 4-point, the reliability calculation was measured. The results showed that the 4-point scale had strong internal consistency with an overall Cronbach's $\alpha=.89$.

The focus-group discussion (FGD) was used as a qualitative data collection technique. This technique implementation was to support the encouragement and interactive conditions that enable students to feel free to share their experiences while listening to their peers' points of view ([Krueger & Casey, 2014](#)). The FGD involved twelve (12) respondents, including six (6) undergraduate students and six (6) graduate students. The respondents were chosen purposively based on the results of quantitative data analysis, representing the high, medium, and low levels of writing anxiety, and male and female genders. This strategy was to obtain rich and comprehensive data from varied academic and anxiety levels among participants. The FGD was conducted on-site in approximately 60 minutes. The students responded to four main topics, which developed from SLWARI: "instructional methods, textbook used in the classroom, writing ability perceptions, and challenges in academic writing".

The combination of those data collection techniques underpinned the methodological triangulation (Fetters, 2023). The survey data was compared and cross-checked with the FGD's data. It allows the validity and reliability of the data to be established.

2.4 Data Analysis

2.4.1 Quantitative Data

SPSS version 23 was used to analyze the data quantitatively. The primary data in this research were obtained from a questionnaire. It was utilized to assess the type and level of writing anxiety based on the criterion-referenced scheme using a 4-point scale. In categorizing the writing anxiety (high, moderate, and low), this study used the mean item score rather than the summed total. This decision was to ensure the balance and comparability among the types (cognitive, somatic, and avoidance behavior) since they have different numbers of items. Besides, it was intended to warrant the interpretability, aligning with the 4-Likert scale anchors. The categorization can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Categories of Anxiety in Writing

No	Level	Average
1	High	3.00 – 4.00
2	Moderate	2.00 – 2.99
3	Low	1.00 – 1.99

The data analysis was initiated by measuring the normality and homogeneity. A Shapiro-Wilk test and Q-Q plots indicated no significant deviation, or a normal distribution, $W=.981$, $p=.174$. By this, the statistical analysis can proceed to the next step. Meanwhile, the following table shows detailed information on the homogeneity test.

Table 2 Result of the Homogeneity Test

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.146	2	333	0.319

Note. The results meet the assumption of homogeneity of variance.

To measure the differences between and within the groups, this study ran a one-way ANOVA. The detailed results can be seen in the following table.

Table 3 ANOVA test result

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P	η^2
Between Groups	188.268	2	94.134	13.447	<.001	.08
Within Groups	2331.205	333	7.001			
Total	2519.473	335				

Note. $\eta^2=.08$, indicated a medium effect size.

2.4.2 Qualitative Data

In analyzing the qualitative data, this study adopted a Directed Qualitative Content Analysis (DQCA) method proposed by [Assarroudi et al. \(2018\)](#). This method can be flexibly implemented to describe certain phenomena through concepts, develop an understanding of the meaning of the communication, and draw a valid conclusion from data (Kibiswa, 2019). It consists of three main phases of analysis: preparation, organization, and reporting. Since the present study inspects the students' points of view through a focus-group discussion, using the DQCA method could ensure greater accuracy and clarity in the process of generating themes. It, then, formed the basis for drawing a conclusion regarding the factors contributing to students' writing anxiety.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Level and Types of Students' Anxiety

Level of students' anxiety

The first measurement is to know the level of anxiety. The detailed data can be seen in the following table.

Table 4 Distribution of Anxiety

Category	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
High Anxiety	5	4
Moderate Anxiety	103	92
Low Anxiety	4	4
Total	112	100

As shown in Table 4, it is found that 103 of 112 students (92%) are in moderate anxiety. Meanwhile, the high and low categories are slightly different. Only 5 of 112 are in the high category, and 4 of 112 are in the low category.

Types of students' anxiety

The analysis of descriptive statistics regarding the types of writing anxiety in this study reveals that cognitive anxiety is on the first order among the types. While the somatic and the avoidance behavior are in the following sequence, respectively, as captured in Table 5.

Table 5 Descriptive statistics of writing anxiety

	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min	Max
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Cognitive Anxiety	112	20.81	2.801	0.265	20.29	21.34	14	32
Somatic Anxiety	112	19.32	2.483	0.235	18.86	19.79	13	28

Avoidance Behaviour	112	19.14	2.644	0.250	18.65	19.64	13	28
Total	336	19.76	2.742	0.150	19.46	20.05	13	32

3.2 Comparison of anxiety based on gender and education level

To measure differences between the groups, a T-test formula was run in the inferential statistics analysis. A distinctive calculation is done between the groups based on gender and academic level. A comprehensive result is presented in the two following tables.

Table 6 Independent samples test based on gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					Cohen's d	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference		Lower	Upper
Anxiety	Equal variances assumed	0,025	0,874	0,543	110	0,588	0,717	1,320	0.10	-1,898	3,333
	Equal variances not assumed			0,545	109,945	0,587	0,717	1,315	0.10	-1,890	3,324

Table 7 Independent samples test based on level of education

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					Cohen's d	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference		Lower	Upper
Anxiety	Equal variances assumed	0,620	0,433	0,537	110	0,593	1,921	3,581	0.09	-5,175	9,017
	Equal variances not assumed			0,536	109,682	0,593	1,921	3,582	0.09	-5,178	9,020

Table 6 reports the findings of the T-test formula calculation to compare the writing anxiety based on gender, male and female. It is known that there is no statistically significant difference between the groups. Resulting in $t=.543$, $p=.588$ with $d=.10$ means that the difference in gender does not bring the difference in the writing anxiety experience. Similarly, as indicated in Table 7, the statistical findings of comparing the undergraduate and graduate students in writing anxiety also show no significant difference. It is found $t=.537$, $p=.593$, and $d=.10$ as the results. These numbers reveal that the educational level does not implicitly differentiate the writing anxiety among students. Collectively, those inventions specify that neither gender nor educational level significantly affects the students' writing anxiety within the sample of this study.

3.3 Factors causing anxiety

In this part, the factors related to writing anxiety are described separately in tables based on gender and educational level. There are three factors derived from the survey: course, teachers, and students' writing ability.

Table 8 Factors causing anxiety based on gender

Factor	Group	N	Mean	SD	T	df	P	Cohen's d
Course	Male	54	14.67	2.56	-0.103	110	0.918	-0.02
	Female	58	14.72	2.58	-0.103	110	0.918	-0.02
Teachers	Male	54	18.15	4.05	1.027	110	0.307	0.19
	Female	58	17.26	5.03	1.027	110	0.307	0.19
Writing Ability	Male	54	30.0	5.27	0.605	110	0.547	0.11
	Female	58	29.28	7.12	0.605	110	0.547	0.11

As presented in Table 8, the results indicate no statistically significant gender differences across the three factors of writing anxiety. For the writing course, male students ($M = 14.67$, $SD = 2.56$) and female students ($M = 14.72$, $SD = 2.58$) showed nearly identical mean scores, $t(110) = -0.10$, $p = .92$, $d = -0.02$. Similarly, teacher-related anxiety was slightly higher among males ($M = 18.15$, $SD = 4.05$) than females ($M = 17.26$, $SD = 5.03$), but this difference was not significant, $t(110) = 1.03$, $p = .31$, $d = 0.19$. In terms of writing ability, males ($M = 30.00$, $SD = 5.27$) and females ($M = 29.28$, $SD = 7.12$) again did not differ significantly, $t(110) = 0.61$, $p = .55$, $d = 0.11$. These findings suggest that gender does not exert a meaningful effect on students' writing anxiety.

Table 9 Factors causing anxiety based on education level

Factor	Group	N	Mean	SD	T	df	P	Cohen's d
Course	S2	57	14.44	3.35	-0.882	110	0.38	-0.17
	S1	55	14.96	2.86	-0.882	110	0.38	-0.17
Teachers	S2	54	18.35	5.08	1.578	110	0.118	0.3
	S1	58	17.0	3.94	1.578	110	0.118	0.3
Writing Ability	S2	54	28.6	6.01	-1.774	110	0.079	-0.34
	S1	58	30.69	6.43	-1.774	110	0.079	-0.34

Table 9 compares writing anxiety by education level. The results reveal no statistically significant differences between undergraduate (S1) and graduate (S2) students. For the writing course, S1 students ($M = 14.96$, $SD = 2.86$) scored slightly higher than S2 students ($M = 14.44$, $SD = 3.35$), but the difference was not statistically significant, $t(110) = -0.88$, $p = .38$, $d = -0.17$. In teacher-related anxiety, S2 students reported somewhat higher scores ($M = 18.35$, $SD = 5.08$) than S1 students ($M = 17.00$, $SD = 3.94$), however, the difference was also non-significant, $t(110) = 1.58$, $p = .12$, $d = 0.30$. For writing ability, S1 students ($M = 30.69$, $SD = 6.43$) scored higher than S2 students ($M = 28.60$, $SD = 6.01$), but again the result was not significant, $t(110) = -1.77$, $p = .08$, $d = -0.34$. While none of the comparisons reached statistical significance, the small-to-moderate effect sizes for teacher and writing ability factors suggest that education level may still have some practical influence, warranting further study.

3.4 Qualitative analysis

A focus-group discussion was carried out with twelve selected participants directly. A deeper and comprehensive understanding of the students' experiences bears four general patterns as the contributing factors influenced writing anxiety. Those patterns are: time constraints, lack of ideas and grammatical knowledge, teachers' teaching method, and coursebook complexity.

3.4.1 Time constraint

The first pattern derived from the students' point of view is the time pressure. Most of the students conveyed that they feel more anxious when writing under a constricted deadline, particularly with an unfamiliar topic or theme. St1 reported, "I feel anxious because of time pressure or a theme I do not understand". Likewise, St5 echoed, "I do not feel anxious most of the time, only when I have to write under a short deadline". Those comments indicate that writing anxiety is not a continual feeling, otherwise, it only appears and grows under a certain condition. Being hurried in writing affected students emotionally and made it harder to think normally.

3.4.2 Lack of ideas and grammatical knowledge

Lack of ideas and grammatical knowledge became one of the factors hindering students for having a good performance in writing, and cultivating anxiety. The majority of students fought to link their thoughts logically and to produce sentences with accurate grammar. St1 said, "I have poor ideas and also make grammatical errors...connecting one sentence to the next sentences". Similarly, St3 informed that actually writing will be easier when the theme is well-known, "If I master the theme, I will likely write fluently...but if I do not [master] it is so hard...especially using the proper grammar in sentence". Furthermore, St4 and St5 stated that they do not have confidence in their grammatical knowledge when writing, "I think my grammatical knowledge is low, so it makes difficulties to handle my writing". Those students' insights show that anxiety can develop when the grammatical knowledge and ideas are insufficient.

3.4.3 Teacher's teaching method

The next factor contributing to writing anxiety is how the writing teachers perform in their instructional activities. The students confirmed that, sometimes, teachers implemented a teacher-centered approach in the teaching and learning process. It made a limited engagement, which caused limited communication between students and the teacher, or among students. St2

mentioned, “[my writing teachers] do not facilitate the students’ learning more comprehensively, [they] only explain the materials...make me anxious when writing”. Moreover, it is added by St4, “only little feedback giving when we finish our writing tasks”. In the same way, St6 echoed, “our writing is only collected, and I do not know which part of my writing is incorrect, because my teachers do not return my writing”. Those remarks highlight the prominence of the teaching approach adopted by writing teachers to reduce students’ anxiety. Besides, sufficient feedback is also necessary to diminish students’ stress and to help them be aware of their errors.

3.4.4 Coursebook complexity

Lastly, students noticed the use of the coursebook in the classroom activities as another factor contributing to the emergence of anxiety. Students explained that they frequently encounter challenges to understand the content of the primary book recommended by their writing teachers. St1 stated, “relevant and comprehensive, but it to hard for me”. Likewise, St4 mentioned both appreciation and apprehension of it “actually, it is [coursebook] a good source to read, it is in line with the curriculum, but, I still difficult to understand”. A similar voice is also stated by St2, “although I understand the meaning of vocabulary, I still face challenges to understand the meaning”. These excerpts confirmed that the complexity of the coursebook barriers their understanding and increases anxiety.

4. DISCUSSION

This study yields two significant findings. The first finding revealed that Indonesian students experienced writing anxiety at a moderate level, with a significant number of 92% of the total students. The cognitive anxiety became the first order among the three types. Secondly, the inferential statistics resulted in a non-significant difference in anxiety between the male and female students, as pointed out in Table 6 ($t=.543, p=.588, d=.10$). Likewise, the comparative analysis between undergraduate and graduate levels showed the same conclusion: no significant difference, as can be seen in Table 7 ($t=.537, p=.593, d=.10$).

The first findings of this study align with Wahyuni et al. (2019) who formerly found that Indonesian students had a moderate level of writing anxiety. However, it contradicts to those studies that discovered university students commonly encountered a high level of anxiety in academic writing ([Aurora et al., 2022](#); [Wahyuni & Umam, 2022](#)). In the theory of L2 motivational self-system ([Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015](#)), an important point is underlined, when students can manage their stress, it can be a driving tool to enhance motivation and promote L2 ideal persistence. In this context of study, the students might be able to control their tensions

due to the two-fold responsibility: English learners and future English teachers as well. Therefore, students need to maintain long-term motivation.

The cognitive strain, as the first order among the types of anxiety, supports the previous findings ([Afdalia et al., 2023](#); [Kurniasih et al., 2023](#)). This similar result strengthens the decisive conclusion that Indonesian EFL students struggle with tasks in the academic writing class. According to cognitive load theory ([de Jong, 2010](#)), if the tasks entail much capacity, the learning will be obstructed due to the limited capacity of humans for working memory. In writing activities, students must not only generate ideas but also maintain the unity and coherence using appropriate linguistic devices simultaneously. As pointed out by some students, “I have poor ideas...difficult to connect one sentence to others properly” (St1) and “I get difficulties to write fluently” (St3). It is reasonable that students face more cognitive anxiety because they compete for cognitive resources in writing. Consequently, it is necessary for writing teachers to adopt a process-oriented writing approach ([Hyland, 2018](#)) in their instructional settings. By implementing all stages in writing, students get more positive exposure and decrease writing anxiety ([Kurniasih et al., 2020](#)).

The absence of a significant difference across gender and academic level based on statistical analysis challenges studies by [Salikin \(2019\)](#), and [Hz \(2024\)](#) who reported that female students are more confronted with high anxiety than males. The effect size (Cohen’s $d=.01-.20$) of the gender difference was categorized as small. However, the effect size (Cohen’s $d=.29-.33$) of the academic level was categorized as small to moderate. It means there is a slight difference captured across academic levels, with graduate students being in a moderate category. It is possibly regarding the institutional demands for students at each level in this context of study. Graduate students take more requirements, such as not only writing a thesis but also publishing an article in an indexed journal. This is well-confirmed by ([Huerta et al., 2017](#); [Lee, 2020](#)) that students on this level manifested much more anxiety than others.

The qualitative findings provided further insight into the quantitative subscales of the SLWAI, revealing how cognitive, somatic, and avoidance-related anxieties manifested in students’ lived experiences. Cognitive anxiety was most evident in difficulties with idea generation and grammar, as several students described struggling to “have poor ideas and also make grammatical errors... connecting one sentence to the next does not connect ideas” (St1). Somatic anxiety was closely linked to time constraints and performance pressure, particularly in exam settings, where students noted that “even though I feel nervous, I still try to finish the

task because the lecturer asks us to submit it” (St4). That avoidance was not an option because “writing is part of the exam and we must complete it” (St7). Avoidance-related anxiety, although relatively low overall, was reflected in frustrations with teacher-centered instruction and limited feedback, as illustrated by the comment: “Our writing is only collected, and I do not know which part is incorrect because they do not return my writing” (St6). Finally, anxiety related to both cognitive and somatic dimensions was also triggered by the use of complex coursebooks, with one student admitting, “Sometimes the material in the book is too difficult, so I feel anxious about not understanding and making mistakes” (St9). Taken together, these interlinked causes align with [Bereiter and Scardamalia’s \(2013\)](#) knowledge-telling model, which highlights idea generation as a developmental bottleneck, and with [Yan and Horwitz’s \(1986\)](#) claim that time pressure undermines fluency and coherence in L2 writing. By integrating scale-based dimensions with student voices, the results underscore how institutional practices and materials interact with psychological processes to shape the experience of writing anxiety in Indonesian higher education.

Students’ critiques of teacher-centered practices reinforced the importance of pedagogical interactionism. The qualitative data indicated that limited feedback and one-way instruction heightened students’ uncertainty, as one remarked, “Our writing is only collected, and I do not know which part is incorrect because they do not return my writing” (ST6). From the perspective of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1980), such absence of dialogic scaffolding may exacerbate anxiety by depriving learners of opportunities to negotiate meaning and refine their writing strategies through social interaction. This finding supports [Ardill’s \(2025\)](#) argument that student-centered feedback, peer review, and dialogic engagement can reduce affective barriers and foster greater confidence in learning. In parallel, the linguistic complexity of textbooks emerged as another source of tension, with students reporting difficulty in decoding sentence-level meaning even when they understood individual words. This reflects [Tomlinson’s \(2012\)](#) claim that instructional materials must be challenging yet comprehensible, and echoes [Zhang’s \(2019\)](#) recommendation to integrate lexico-grammatical support, such as sentence frames and parallel texts, to scaffold comprehension and reduce anxiety. Taken together, these insights suggest that writing anxiety is not only a matter of emotional discomfort but also a product of the interaction between cognitive load, cultural expectations, pedagogical design, and learner identity. Addressing it, therefore, requires an integrative approach that attends simultaneously to learners’ psychological self-beliefs, instructional strategies, and the institutional contexts in which they write.

5. CONCLUSION

This present study explored the writing anxiety of students in English language education study programs in a state university in Bengkulu, Indonesia. The investigation concerned variations in gender and academic level. The findings revealed that students experienced a moderate level of writing anxiety. Regarding the type of anxiety, the results show that cognitive anxiety became the first order among the three types, followed by somatic and avoidance behavior. Probably, it is caused by the high demand from university regulations, such as the need to write a thesis, and even to publish a research article at the undergraduate level. This condition bears their cognitive load to be more precisely. Furthermore, the statistical findings discovered that there is no significant difference in writing anxiety based on either gender or academic level. Regarding the factors contributing to the anxiety, four factors were found. Those factors are: time constraints, lack of ideas and grammatical knowledge, teachers' teaching method, and coursebook complexity. It means that the personal challenges and instructional methods become the most prominent factors that lead to writing anxiety.

Several limitations are acknowledged in this study. The respondents of this study were only from a university. It might be a restricted setting that cannot be used to get more generalization. The further studies should consider to examine the broader sample from some universities in the same context, thus the ample data can be used to generalize the conclusion. Besides, this study obtained the data only from the students' perspective (a survey and FGD) without any observation. It is probably a narrow technique to lead to a rigorous deduction. Future studies can add more methods of data collection, such as observing the students' activity in the classroom and examining the instructional sources to get more sufficient data.

In short, the findings of this study provide some implications for English writing instructions, especially in the Indonesian higher education context. To reduce students' anxiety when writing, the teachers need to design attractive and engaging activities as well as provide adequate feedback on students' papers. In addition, writing teachers need to ensure supportive learning environments, including the textbook used during the learning process.

6. REFERENCES

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