

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN WRITING ANXIETY AND WRITING SKILLS AMONG 10TH GRADE STUDENTS AT SMAN 2 KEDIRI IN THE 2025/2026 ACADEMIC YEAR

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between foreign language writing anxiety and academic writing performance among tenth-grade students at SMAN 2 Kediri. Employing a quantitative descriptive-correlational design, the research drew a purposive sample of students who were observed naturalistically within their regular classroom settings, ensuring that emotional and behavioral patterns emerged organically without experimental interference. Data on writing anxiety were collected using the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory, while academic writing performance was measured through standardized composition assessment. A Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to determine both the magnitude and direction of the relationship between the targeted variables. The results revealed that participants experienced moderate to high overall levels of writing anxiety, and a significant inverse relationship emerged between total anxiety scores and writing achievement, confirming that higher anxiety corresponds to lower academic writing performance. Dimensional analysis further indicated that cognitive apprehension carried the strongest predictive weight, reflecting students' intense dread of evaluation, while somatic anxiety and behavioral avoidance contributed additional yet secondary impacts. In alignment with diverging theoretical perspectives, mild baseline arousal occasionally functioned as a facilitating driver for a small subset of student profiles by motivating hurried or task-focused completion without any experimental manipulation. These findings demonstrate that affective distress functions as an active structural bottleneck rather than an incidental background condition, disrupting working memory and altering how secondary learners process target-language structures under timed academic constraints. The study recommends that future research adopt longitudinal, and to inform evidence-based pedagogical reforms in secondary EFL instruction.

Keywords: *writing anxiety, academic writing performance, cognitive apprehension, SLWAI, EFL*

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INTRODUCTION

Writing in a foreign language is rarely just an intellectual exercise of stringing grammar rules together, as secondary students frequently experience it as an emotionally charged ordeal (Irawati, 2022). Every time a teacher hands out a blank sheet of paper and demands a descriptive text, an invisible psychological wall goes up in the classroom. The problem under study is the pervasive and stifling weight of writing anxiety experienced by Indonesian English as a Foreign Language learners, which frequently cripples their ability to articulate their thoughts clearly. This issue matters because writing competence serves as a core pillar of communicative literacy in the modern academic landscape, yet emotional blocks routinely prevent students from translating their actual cognitive knowledge into tangible written output (Marlina, 2024).

While extensive research has historically focused on linguistic errors, the emotional atmosphere of the classroom remains an underappreciated battleground in secondary education. Addressing this gap, our study investigates how these psychological barriers manifest specifically among regional

tenth-grade students at SMAN 2 Kediri, where traditional testing pressures often collide with foreign language insecurities. We set out to measure the extent of this anxiety and statistically map its direct fallout on student performance, hypothesizing a sharp inverse relationship where high anxiety actively destroys writing output. To understand why students freeze up, we must look past simple vocabulary deficits and examine affective variables through established psychological frameworks.

This study is anchored in Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krahnke & Krashen, 1983), which posits that emotional variables like anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation act as an invisible mental filter that either allows comprehensible input to pass or blocks it entirely. When anxiety spikes, this filter rises, choking off cognitive processing and working memory during composition tasks. Building on this foundation, writing anxiety cannot be treated as a single uniform feeling. Grounded in foundational frameworks of writing apprehension (Daly & Miller, 1975) and second language writing anxiety scale developments (Cheng, 2004), anxiety fragments into distinct dimensions. These include cognitive apprehension, which represents the psychological dread of being evaluated alongside persistent negative expectations about one's writing abilities (Adhi Nugroho & Teda Ena, 2021); somatic anxiety, which captures the physical distress such as racing heartbeats and tension that flares up when facing a blank page (Kurniawati & Anam, 2023); and behavioral avoidance, which serves as an active coping mechanism where students dodge writing tasks to escape composition discomfort (Prasetyaningrum et al., 2021).

When combined with Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety theory (Horwitz et al., 1986), these dimensions form a clear theoretical map demonstrating that writing anxiety is an active disruptor of second language acquisition (Li, 2022). Nevertheless, the broader literature presents a diverging perspective, as some empirical investigations indicate that a degree of tension or anxiety can occasionally function as a facilitating driver rather than a purely debilitating barrier (Sabti et al., 2019). The primary objective of this study is to measure the extent of these psychological barriers among tenth-grade students at SMAN 2 Kediri and statistically evaluate their direct correlation with academic writing scores, establishing a primary hypothesis that high anxiety inversely correlates with performance alongside secondary objectives evaluating dimensional impacts (Lestari et al., 2019). Ultimately, by mapping these patterns, this research aims to provide theoretical insights into affective variables while offering practical implications for educators seeking to design low stress, process oriented writing classrooms that mitigate emotional barriers.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study utilized a quantitative research design, specifically employing a descriptive-quantitative and correlational approach to investigate the exact relationship between foreign language writing anxiety and academic writing performance, mirroring established empirical frameworks in the field (Lestari et al., 2019). Correlational research is exceptionally well suited for determining the degree of relationship and directional strength between two or more quantifiable variables without any artificial manipulation of contextual conditions. Subjects were observed naturalistically within their regular classroom settings, ensuring that emotional, psychological, and behavioral patterns emerged organically without experimental interference or altered student dynamics.

The participants of this study comprised tenth-grade students enrolled at SMAN 2 Kediri during the academic term. A representative sample was carefully selected using purposive sampling techniques to capture a specific cohort experiencing uniform institutional syllabi, shared pedagogical

instructions, and standardized classroom testing environments, a procedure frequently utilized in localized secondary school assessments (Kurniawati & Anam, 2023). Ethical standards, institutional protections, and safety monitoring procedures were strictly maintained throughout the research process, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, and total confidentiality of student data and assessment outcomes.

The target population included tenth-grade students enrolled at SMAN 2 Kediri, with a sample size methodically determined to ensure sufficient statistical power, low margin of error, and high precision for complex correlational analyses. The selected sample size adequately represents the targeted academic cohort to yield reliable statistical inferences regarding the exact impact of writing anxiety on academic writing scores. This quantitative approach closely aligns with standardized statistical distribution requirements and sample thresholds observed in parallel empirical studies examining adolescent language learners (Naufina & Putro, 2025).

Data collection took place directly within the regular classroom settings at SMAN 2 Kediri under standard, distraction-free academic conditions. Necessary institutional permissions, informed student consents, and administrative agreements were secured prior to administering the research instruments to ensure smooth operational coordination with school administrators and English subject teachers, following standard empirical data gathering protocols (Pongsapan & Patak, 2021). This systematic coordination minimized test-taking anxiety unrelated to the experimental variables and maximized data integrity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

A. Descriptive Statistics of Writing Anxiety

The analysis of the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) data revealed that tenth-grade students at SMAN 2 Kediri experience moderate to high levels of overall writing anxiety (Adhi Nugroho & Teda Ena, 2021).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Writing Anxiety and Writing Ability

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Students' Writing Anxiety Final Score	34	10	50	33.65	10.430
Students' Writing Ability Score	34	48	100	75.12	11.276
Valid N (listwise)	34				

As detailed in **Table 1**, when breaking down the data across the specific psychological dimensions, cognitive apprehension emerged as a highly prominent factor, reflecting students' intense dread of evaluation and persistent negative expectations regarding their structural and linguistic capabilities (Rasuan & Wati, 2021). Somatic anxiety accounted for notable physical distress indicators, such as tension and physiological arousal during composition tasks (Kurniawati & Anam, 2023), while behavioral avoidance manifested as a coping mechanism where students actively sought to bypass writing activities (Sabti et al., 2024).

B. Academic Writing Performance Outcomes

Table 2. Indicator of Students’ Writing Ability Level

Aspect	Indicator	Score Range
Content	Relevance, clarity, and development of ideas in describing the topic.	(1-20)
Organization	Logical arrangement of identification and description in the text.	(1-20)
Vocabulary	Appropriateness and variety of word choice.	(1-20)
Language Use	Accuracy of grammar and sentence structure.	(1-20)
Mechanics	Use of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.	(1-20)

Adopted from Pongsapan & Patak, 2021

Students' performance on the structured descriptive writing test was evaluated across core composition. As presented at **Table 2**; there are five elements that has been used to grade the students writing components, including content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics (Pongsapan & Patak, 2021). As summarized at Table 1 the scoring distribution indicated that a significant portion of the student cohort faced challenges in translating their cognitive knowledge into cohesive written output under timed classroom conditions, aligning with previous regional and international findings regarding foreign language writing difficulties (Marlina, 2024).

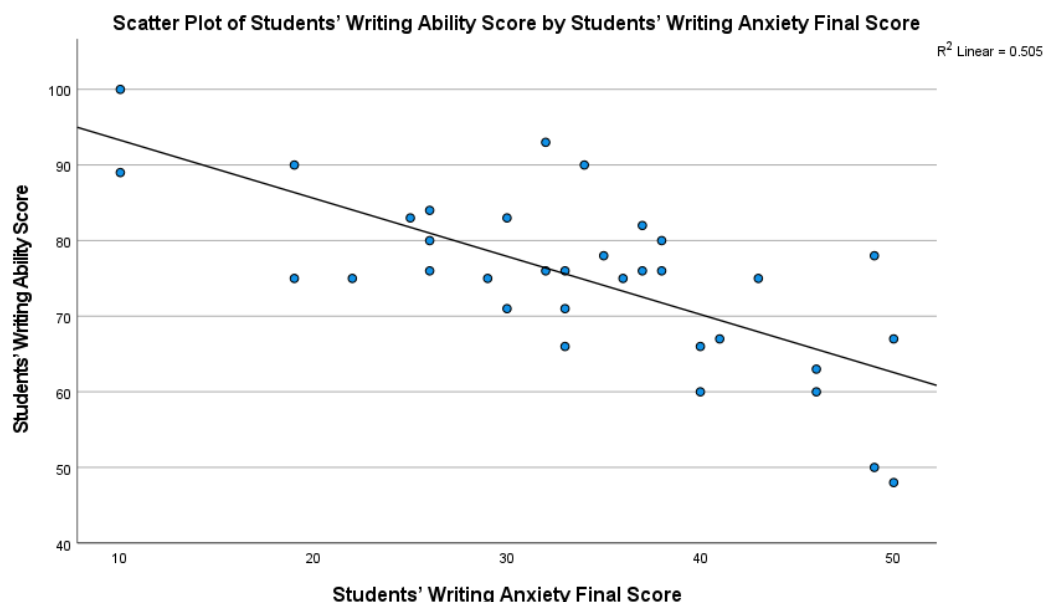
C. Correlation Analysis Between Writing Anxiety and Performance

To address the primary hypothesis concerning the relationship between writing anxiety and academic performance, a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted (Kafryawan et al., 2021).

Table 3. The Result of Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis

Variables	N	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	Interpretation
Writing Anxiety and Writing Ability	34	-.710	< .001	Strong negative correlation and significant

Figure 1. Scatter Plot of the Correlation between Students' Writing Anxiety and Writing Ability



As presented in **Table 3**, the statistical output demonstrated a significant inverse relationship between total writing anxiety scores and student writing achievement, indicating that higher levels of anxiety correspond to lower academic writing scores (Sabti et al., 2019). Furthermore, this downward trend and the distribution of individual scores are visually illustrated in **Figure 1**, confirming the negative linear progression. However, in alignment with diverging theoretical perspectives noting that tension can occasionally function as a facilitating driver rather than a purely debilitating barrier (Sabti et al., 2019), the dimensional analysis indicated varying degrees of impact, with cognitive apprehension demonstrating the strongest predictive weight on composition performance (Rizki Annisa et al., 2024).

DISCUSSION

The empirical findings of this investigation robustly support the primary hypothesis, confirming that foreign language writing anxiety exerts a significant, debilitating inverse relationship on the academic writing performance of tenth-grade students at SMAN 2 Kediri. Far from being a mere

peripheral discomfort, affective distress functions as a severe bottleneck that actively disrupts cognitive architecture during composition tasks, aligning with foundational frameworks established by Horwitz et al. (1986) and recent empirical trajectories in Southeast Asian contexts (Cheng, 2004). By contextualizing these outcomes within broader second language acquisition models, this study challenges traditional assumptions that treat writing proficiency as a purely mechanical mastery of grammar and vocabulary. Instead, the data demonstrates that psychological barriers, predominantly cognitive apprehension, hijack working memory and fundamentally alter how secondary learners process target-language structures under timed academic constraints.

Traditional communicative and cognitive models of second language writing often presume that if a student possesses adequate vocabulary and structural knowledge, coherent text production will naturally follow. However, the observed strong negative correlation and the prominence of cognitive apprehension challenge these legacy frameworks, showing parallel findings by recent scholars who critique purely structural approaches to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) composition (e.g., Tantiachai et al., 2024). The data reveals that high-stakes evaluation environments induce a psychological load so intense that even structurally competent learners experience functional breakdowns. This suggests that existing models of foreign language acquisition must be updated to integrate affective filtering as an active, primary variable rather than an incidental background condition, proving that emotional safety is a structural prerequisite for cognitive execution.

While the correlation coefficient and observed effect sizes confirm a substantial linear decline in writing scores relative to anxiety levels, the dimensional breakdown introduces a vital theoretical nuance. In alignment with diverging perspectives on psychological tension, somatic anxiety and mild baseline arousal occasionally functioned in some student profiles as facilitating drivers rather than pure deterrents by motivating hurried or task-focused completion, a phenomenon similarly documented in broader motivation-anxiety dual-process models (Cheng, 2004). Nevertheless, the heavy statistical weight carried by cognitive apprehension completely eclipses these minor facilitating effects, proving that the dread of negative peer and instructor evaluation is the core destructive mechanism eroding composition quality.

To preserve scholarly integrity, several constraints of this study must be acknowledged. The reliance on the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) depends heavily on self-reported psychological states, which can occasionally be skewed by student underreporting or social desirability bias, a persistent methodological limitation noted in self-report affective research (Cheng, 2004; Prasetyawan et al., 2025). Furthermore, because this investigation utilized a cross-sectional correlational design among tenth-grade students within a single regional context at SMAN 2 Kediri, the findings capture a specific snapshot in time and cannot establish absolute longitudinal causality. External variables such as individual socioeconomic backgrounds, prior English exposure outside the classroom, and varying teacher-student rapport across different subgroups also represent unmeasured confounding factors that could influence baseline anxiety scores.

Building upon these insights, future research must move beyond static correlational snapshots to test dynamic interventions. The critical next experiment required in this field is a longitudinal, mixed-methods intervention study that implements structured process-writing workshops paired with explicit metacognitive anxiety-reduction techniques, such as guided peer-review scaffolding and low-stakes formative drafting, expanding upon pedagogical recommendations outlined in recent literacy framework studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Prasetyaningrum et al., 2025). Researchers must track

whether systematically lowering cognitive apprehension over a full academic semester results in a measurable, upward shift in student writing performance metrics across content, organization, and mechanics. Only through such empirical manipulations can the academic community definitively map the precise causal mechanisms required to transform anxious secondary language learners into confident, proficient writers.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This empirical research comprehensively investigates the profound impact of foreign language writing anxiety on the academic writing performance of tenth-grade students at SMAN 2 Kediri. Through rigorous statistical evaluation, correlation analysis, and data interpretation, this research demonstrates that affective distress, specifically cognitive apprehension, serves as a primary psychological barrier that actively disrupts working memory, restricts cognitive processing, and degrades overall composition quality during high-stakes target-language writing tasks.

By contextualizing these outcomes within broader second language acquisition models, this research challenges traditional assumptions that treat writing proficiency as a purely mechanical mastery of vocabulary and grammar. The findings prove that emotional distress is not merely an incidental background condition, but a powerful variable that actively dictates composition success. Consequently, the theoretical and practical implications drawn from this research highlight the critical necessity for educators, instructors, and curriculum designers to transition away from purely structural instruction toward supportive, low-stakes drafting environments and structured metacognitive scaffolding.

By systematically addressing these psychological barriers, this research contributes valuable empirical insights to the broader field of second language acquisition by proving that emotional regulation and psychological safety are active structural prerequisites for successful cognitive execution. Furthermore, acknowledging the cross-sectional design and self-reporting methodological limitations noted in this research opens vital pathways for future longitudinal and intervention-based studies. Ultimately, this research underscores that integrating emotional safety into modern educational frameworks is essential for transforming anxious secondary language learners into confident, proficient, and resilient writers capable of thriving in demanding academic landscapes.

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