



Writing Anxiety and Language Learning Motivation: Examining Causes, Indicators, and Relationship

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To cite this article:

Jerryk C. Alico. Writing Anxiety and Language Learning Motivation: Examining Causes, Indicators, and Relationship. *Communication and Linguistics Studies*. Vol. 2, No. 1, 2016, pp. 6-12. doi: 10.11648/j.cls.20160201.12

Received: September 11, 2016; **Accepted:** October 26, 2016; **Published:** November 30, 2016

Abstract: The affective domain has already received great attention from researchers as evidenced by a large body of literature made since its conception. This paper aims to draw a connection between writing anxiety and motivation, which are both affective variables associated to language learning. Using mixed-methods design, data were collected from 60 students who finished a one-semester English class in the Pre-University Center, Mindanao State University-Marawi, Philippines. Data revealed that students had low writing anxiety. They reported during the interviews that, despite their low anxiety level, there are still reasons for their writing anxiety such as grammar, evaluation, and topical knowledge. They also had a high level of instrumental and integrative motivation. They appreciated the instrumental function and contributions of the English subject, the communicative activities, and the instructor teaching the subject. The correlation and regression analyses revealed that as language learning motivation increases, writing anxiety level decreases. It led to the conclusion that writing anxiety can be lessened through motivating students to learn English. Based on the findings, English teachers should put premium on motivation in their classrooms by being effective role models to students, inspiring students to write in order to learn and to learn in order to write, appreciating their writing outputs, and exposing them to real life applications of the English macroskills.

Keywords: English as a Second Language, Writing Anxiety, Language Learning, Language Learning Motivatio

1. Introduction

As mentioned by Younas et al. (2014), writing receives much attention from EFL practitioners and researchers (Jun, 2008) as it is considered imperative for success not just in education but also in employment (Tuan, 2010). Writing is a productive skill, which needs competence in other macroskills, namely listening, reading, and speaking. Silva (1993) had stated already that writing in a second language is definitely different in various aspects from writing in the first language. Thus, it is a demanding task especially to second language learners due to the undeniably difficult prerequisites to satisfy before being able to master writing.

Research on motivation as well as anxiety is not actually new. Even Tsai and Chang (2013) supported the same belief, stating that a large body of literature that deals with psychological aspects of learning, namely motivation and anxiety, has already accumulated. When literatures are reviewed, it can be found that motivation (Clement et al.

1994; Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993; Dornyei, 2001) and anxiety (Horwitz et al. 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989; Liu, 2006; Liu and Jackson, 2008) compose the fundamental constructs in language learning studies. Liu and Huang (2011) further posited that these variables are vital correlates of language learning achievement. Hence, when talking about building the ground for this present study, there is perhaps more than enough literature that can suffice. However, while it is true that many researchers have already conducted voluminous studies on motivation and anxiety, the researcher believes that there exist very few studies on the potential correlation between the two.

The basic essential concepts in this paper that need substantial discussions are language learning motivation and anxiety. These factors are common in classrooms and teachers do observe and encounter them daily. Despite this constant contact, there is still less effort to understand them and to look into their nature as significant variables involved in language learning. For establishing understanding, this paper discusses them consequently.

Motivation, as what experts assert, is an affective variable that exists within learners. It is an ultimately important individual differences (ID) factor (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), which has a considerably large contribution to language learning achievement (Dörnyei, 2005). Language learning motivation, specifically second language motivation, is defined by Gardner (1985) as “the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity” (p. 10). According to Gardner (2010), in learning a language, motivation and motivation have to be clarified. He defined motivation as “the overall aim, purpose, direction, and/or goal of the activity” (p. 16), while motivation is the “combination of the learner’s attitude, desires, and willingness to expend effort in order to learn the second language” (Richards and Schmidt, 2002: 343). In this study, language learning motivation is the one studied together with anxiety. For Horwitz (1990), motivation pertains to the learners’ outlooks for a particular language, its culture and the individual pragmatic reasons for learning a foreign language (Engin, 2009).

As Tsai and Chang (2013) posited, many empirical researchers and theorists have dealt with the role of motivation in learning a language for almost four decades already. Despite the countless ideas on motivation, the researcher adopted the theory of motivation formulated by Robert Gardner because it is based on a bilingual setting, particularly in Canada, where English and French are official languages taught in schools. In the Philippines, English and Filipino are also official languages taught from grade school to college. Hence, it fits the setting of the study. Integrative motivation and instrumental motivation are two important concepts in Gardner’s theory. Integrative motivation occurs when learners hold favorable attitudes to the language/culture, and wish to identify with the culture of speakers of that language. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, refers to the utility value of learning a second/foreign language, such as passing examinations, financial rewards or future career. In other words, Lucas et.al (2010) noted that integrative motivation is characterized by the desire to learn a second language to interact with communities speaking that language while instrumental motivation is the desire to learn a second language for practical purposes. The two types of motivation will be the ones explored in this study.

The second variable in this study is anxiety, which many researchers have actually explored and related to language learning success. However, only a few related it to language learning motivation. In this study, a specific type of anxiety is studied, that is writing anxiety. Daly and Miller coined the term in 1975 after the communication researches conducted in the 1970s pointed out a type of anxiety specific to written communication. Daly and Wilson (1983) defined writing apprehension as “a situation and subject specific individual difference associated with a person’s tendencies to approach or avoid situations perceived to potentially require writing accompanied by some amount of perceived evaluation” (p. 327). A large body of literature proves that writing anxiety is a debilitating factor toward English performance. It includes Lee and Krashen’s (1997) and Lee’s (2002) researches that

investigated Taiwanese university students’ writing anxiety and its relationship to writing performance. Results revealed that writing anxiety and actual EFL writing performance have a significant relationship. Moreover, Daly (1985) concluded that students with high writing anxiety scored low in writing tests. Cheng et al. (1999) also conducted a study, which reported that fear of evaluation was a significant factor in English writing classes. In Shang’s (2012) study, students reported that their English writing anxiety was caused by their fear to commit mistakes in language structures such as grammar and vocabulary.

Indeed, motivation and anxiety play significant roles in the process of language learning. There is a need to do research on the interrelationship between individual differences variables (DeKeyser, 2012; Dörnyei, 2009, 2010; Piniel and Csizer, 2013), two of which are motivation and anxiety. This widely known claim is the point of departure of this present study. Its objectives are: (1) to explore the writing anxiety of English language learners and its causes; (2) to determine the language learning motivation of learners and its contributory factors; and (3) to draw a connection between the writing anxiety and language learning motivation of learners.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study made use of the mixed methods design, specifically the sequential explanatory design. Creswell (2009) describes it as the collection of quantitative data at the first phase of the study followed by the collection of qualitative data at the second phase. This design aims at establishing quantitative findings first and then support and enrich such findings with qualitative results. In this study, the survey on students’ writing anxiety and motivation took place first, and then followed by interviews with some students.

2.2. Research Subjects

Fifty-nine (59) pre-university students enrolled in the first semester of academic year 2015-2016 served as subjects of this research. As pre-university students, they were enrolled in the Pre-University Center (PUC) of the Mindanao State University-Marawi. The PUC is an academic intervention program whose aim is to upgrade the academic preparations of the academically disadvantaged or less-prepared high school graduates from the cultural minorities and indigenous communities in Mindanao especially the Muslims. To expand the scope of the program, students from the mainstream cultural groups were included. Students enrolled in the Center were those who fell short in the Mindanao State University’s System Admission and Scholarship Examination. With a passing score of 75, they gained scores 60 to 74 out of 180. Currently, the PUC does not function anymore as a consequence to the implementation of the Senior High School as mandated by the K to 12 Basic Education Program in the Philippines.

2.3. Research Instruments

The researcher used three instruments to collect the needed data. First instrument used was the English Writing Anxiety Scale developed by Lee (2005). It has fifteen (15) statements rated using 5-point Likert Scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The second instrument was the Language Learning Motivation Scale taken from the study of Tsai and Chang (2013). Only ten (10) items measuring integrative and instrumental motivation were utilized from the questionnaire for this study. Last instrument used was an interview schedule containing questions about the reasons behind students’ writing anxiety and the factors that motivate students to learn English.

2.4. Data Analysis

Since this study used mixed methods design, both quantitative and qualitative techniques were employed to analyze the gathered data. In the quantitative analysis, mean, standard deviation, Pearson *r*, and linear regression analysis were run in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 14.0. In the qualitative analysis, content analysis through coding was done to analyze the interview responses of the students.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Students’ Writing Anxiety

In Table 1 below, the students’ writing anxiety level is

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of students’ writing anxiety.

Statements	N	M	SD	Description
Writing is a lot of fun.	59	4.13	.706	Agree
I like writing down my ideas.	59	4.13	.819	Agree
I enjoy writing.	59	4.11	.696	Agree
I look forward to writing down my ideas.	58	4.10	.640	Agree
I have no fear of my writing being checked and evaluated.	59	4.06	.868	Agree
I feel confident in my ability to clearly express my ideas in writing.	59	4.00	.809	Agree
Expressing ideas through writing does not seem to be a waste of time.	59	3.93	1.096	Agree
I like to have my friends read what I have written.	59	3.83	1.002	Agree
Submitting a composition makes me feel good.	58	3.79	.932	Agree
I don’t avoid writing.	58	3.68	1.142	Agree
I’m not nervous about writing.	59	3.66	.939	Agree
People seem to enjoy what I write.	59	3.45	.794	Agree
I am not afraid of writing essays when I know they will be checked and evaluated.	59	3.42	1.101	Agree
My mind does not seem to go blank when I start to work on composition.	59	3.20	1.030	Undecided
I seem to be able to write down my ideas clearly.	58	3.17	.861	Undecided
OVERALL MEAN		3.78	0.896	LOW ANXIETY

3.2. Reasons Behind Students’ Writing Anxiety

This section presents the reasons behind students’ anxiety as what they reported during the interviews. Three themes emerged from their interview responses, to wit: Grammar, Evaluation, and Topical Knowledge.

3.2.1. Grammar

In the interviews, students revealed that they were afraid of writing in English because of their lack of confidence in their grammatical knowledge. They felt uncertain about the correctness of their compositions as to grammaticality. Here are some of their statements:

found to be low as shown by their agreement to almost all of the statements in the English Writing Anxiety Scale (EWAS). Data revealed that for the students, writing is a lot of fun and they like writing down their ideas. As they enjoy writing and look forward to writing down their ideas, they do not fear being checked and evaluated and feel confident in their ability to clearly express their ideas in writing. On the other hand, they were undecided whether their mind do not seem to go blank when they start to work on composition and whether they seem to be able to write down clearly their ideas. The findings imply two important ideas. First, based on the positive responses of the students, they are indeed in favor and have positive attitude towards English writing. It suggests they do have a considerable level of predilection to writing as they deem it enjoyable and worth their time and effort. They do not even feel trepidation when they engaged in English writing in which the teacher would check and evaluate. Thus, they are willing to receive comments and feedback. Second, despite their positive attitude toward writing, they perceive themselves as imperfect when it comes to English writing since they are still susceptible to cognitive limitations and difficulties. In the next section, the reasons behind their writing anxiety are identified according to their interview responses.

- “I’m afraid of my grammar – that’s why I want to improve my grammar.”*
- “Sometimes I’m afraid because I’m afraid of my grammar.”*
- “Sometimes I’m not confident with my grammar; I have a lot of ideas but I can’t express it in English.”*
- “I am doubtful of my grammar.”*

Rezaei and Jafari (2014) interviewed highly anxious students and they found that poor linguistic and writing abilities were the primary reasons behind students’ writing anxiety. Same finding also emerged in the study of Latif (2007) wherein he added lack of vocabulary knowledge aside

from grammar difficulties. Al-Shboul and Huwari (2015) pertained to it as lack of knowledge in English structures, while Kirmizi and Kirmizi (2015) referred to such cause as linguistic problems.

Although the Philippines has been known to be the third largest English speaking country in the world (Yahoo! News, 2016), many Filipinos, even those in higher education institutions, have doubts on their English use, especially when it comes to accuracy in grammar. Common observation among Filipinos is the high regard for grammaticality. This has two effects on the learners; they either become good English users or become anxious learners because of the demand for perfection, which could be the source of discouragement and anxiety.

3.2.2. Evaluation

Aside from grammar, students also reported evaluation as a source of their writing anxiety in English. Based on their statements below, they feel anxious about writing when their writing outputs are checked and evaluated, particularly by others like their classmates. Their fear clearly stems from the anticipation that people will judge their writing negatively. Probably, they previously had bad experiences with evaluation of their compositions, which may have conditioned them to fear English writing. Some of their statements are the following:

“Sometimes I’m afraid when they [compositions] will be checked.”

“I’m afraid that everyone judges my composition... that they will pity me because I’m poor in English”

“I’m afraid because I’m afraid that people will judge my essay as wrong grammar.”

Horwitz (1986), when she pointed out that language anxiety might be caused by fear of social evaluation as one of the three performance anxieties together with communication apprehension and test anxiety, supports this finding. Moreover, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) further explained fear of negative evaluation as “both the academic and personal evaluations made by students on the basis of their performance and competence in the target language” (p. 105). Latif (2007) also found fear of criticism as one of the causes of writing anxiety. In fact, both Oxford (1990) and Lee (2001) stress that students with fear of criticism tend to be highly conscious about writing rules, which, according to

Hussein (2013), “prevents them from being creative risk takers during the writing process” (p. 39).

3.2.3. Topical Knowledge

Last cause of writing anxiety according to the students is topical knowledge, especially in situations when they have less or no knowledge at all on the topic they are writing about. They said:

“Sometimes I don’t have ideas about the topic.”

“I’m afraid because I don’t know how to start. I don’t know anything about the topic.”

“Sometimes it depends on the topic.”

“Sometimes there are no ideas that come up in my mind.”

“I don’t know if my answers to the essay are correct or wrong.”

Practically, we cannot give what we do not have. This is also true to the writing process. Nothing could be written about something if the writer does not possess sufficient information about that something. In effect, it would certainly frighten someone, especially a student, who has the task to explain or argue through writing about a particular topic when he or she lacks adequate knowledge. Students may know the rules of writing as well as the writing process, but that knowledge would definitely be futile without awareness of the topic to write about.

Lin and Ho (2009), in their study on Taiwanese students’ anxiety, found issues in writing subjects, which pertain to students’ problems in writing due to uninteresting topics, which they are not knowledgeable. Hussein (2013) further confirms that students become anxious as writing topics that are beyond their knowledge confront them.

3.3. Students’ Language Learning Motivation

This section sheds light on the language learning motivation of the students, which are integrative and instrumental. As revealed in Table 2 below, the students reported having high integrative and instrumental motivation towards English language learning. In the integrative motivation, students revealed that, with the highest mean value, they would better understand and appreciate English culture through learning English. Thus, it implies that they are willing to immerse and experience integration with native English speakers.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Language Learning Motivation.

Statements	M	SD	Interpretation
Integrative Motivation			
1. English will help me acquire new ideas and broaden my outlook.	3.25	.378	Strongly Agree
2. English will enable me to better understand and appreciate English culture.	3.52	.466	Strongly Agree
3. I am interested in English music.	3.27	.600	Strongly Agree
4. I can learn more about the world through learning English.	3.34	.477	Strongly Agree
Instrumental Motivation			
5. English is necessary to get a good job.	3.69	.597	Strongly Agree
6. English is essential to be active in society.	3.37	.584	Strongly Agree
7. English will help me if I should ever travel abroad.	3.66	.685	Strongly Agree
8. English is essential for personal development.	3.34	.709	Strongly Agree
9. English will be helpful for my future career.	3.83	.715	Strongly Agree
10. English will help me to pass my exams and graduate from college.	3.68	.778	Strongly Agree

Furthermore, in the instrumental motivation, students also expressed high regard to the usefulness of English in their future career and deemed English necessary to acquire a job. Certainly, they do not only consider English as a ticket to immersion with native speakers but also as a tool for transformation into productive citizens and professionals in the future. Overall, they have high levels of integrative and instrumental motivations toward English language learning.

3.4. Desirable Aspects of the English Subject

During the interview, students were also asked about what they like about the English subject. The researcher aimed at determining what aspects of English enabled them to develop positive attitude and inclination towards learning the language. Three themes emerged from the responses of the students to the interview question, to wit: instrumental function and contributions, communicative activities, and the instructor/teacher.

3.4.1. Instrumental Function and Contributions

When students were asked what they like about English, most of them pointed out the practical utility and useful contributions that the language offer them. Here are some of their statements:

“The language itself—it can help me easily to communicate with people around the world and talk to English speaking people in a grammatical way.”

“I like it because it helps me learn to develop my language skills. It can give me confidence to stand for my ideas and helps me improve my paragraph development skills and it gives me strong motivation to be confident with myself.”

“It helps boost my confidence and it helps me to be competitive. I like English to the point that I always write poems, songs, rap and sometimes unfinished stories.”

“It is very important in our lives because without English we cannot easily talk to people from other countries.”

“I can use it when I go to other countries.”

As can be gleaned in the above statements, students found the English subject as an instrument to improve themselves as English language learners. They have strong predilection to the subject because it helps them enhance their confidence, language skills such as speaking and writing, and motivation to learn. Most importantly, in support to the high degree of instrumental motivation revealed in Table 2, students reported that they like the English subject because it can develop their communication skills, which would later on be useful when they communicate with people from other countries.

3.4.2. Communicative Activities

Besides utility, the English subject was seen as a desirable subject because of the communicative activities employed during the teaching and learning process. As what the students told:

“I like the reporting, role playing and other activities.”

“I like it when we have recitation because I love to express what I know and what I feel.”

“I really like to report and role play.”

“I like it because of many activities and role playing.”

“I like it when I write essay because in that way I can express my ideas.”

Based on their responses, it can be implied that students tend to prefer and appreciate an English class with many communicative tasks in which they are actively involved like reporting, role playing, and others. This suggests that communicative language teaching allows for better participation of students in the learning process, which then eventually leads to winning their favor for the subject.

3.4.3. Instructor/Teacher

The last component of the English subject that students expressed liking is the instructor or teacher of the subject. This may seem unusual because students tend to perceive their teachers as dreadful and demotivating. However, students mentioned in the interviews:

“My instructor taught enthusiastically and humorously. I felt not bored.”

“I like it because of our instructor.”

Their statements show that teachers can be a factor that influences students’ perception and attitude towards the English subject. As mentioned, students like English because their teachers taught in a way that shows enthusiasm and humor. These two elements can actually elicit interest and motivation from students for they can view learning as a fun and enjoyable activity.

3.5. Correlation Between Writing Anxiety and Language Learning Motivation

Tables 3a. and 3b. show the correlation and regression analysis results between writing anxiety and language learning motivation. The data reveal that there is a significant relationship between writing anxiety level and language learning motivation level since the significance value 0.001 is less than 0.05 significance level. This means that as motivation increases, writing anxiety decreases.

Gardner, Masgoret, & Tremblay (1999) once posited that an individual’s degree of motivation seems to affect his or her degree of language anxiety. The finding of the present study shows that this effect pertains to the facilitative role of motivation in the alleviation of writing anxiety. More studies support the finding of this study such as that of Brown, Robson, and Rosenkjar, (2001), Krashen (2002), and many others.

Table 3a. Correlation between Writing Anxiety and English Language Learning Motivation.

Writing Anxiety vs.	Pearson Correlation	.420(**)
Language Learning	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
Motivation	N	59

Table 3b. Model Summary.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.420(a)	.176	.162	.29204	.176	12.196	1	57	.001

a Predictors: (Constant), anxiety

Data further reveal that language learning motivation, aside from its role towards language learning success, is also a strong predictor of low writing anxiety. This suggests that one way to predict an individual's level of writing anxiety is to check his or her level of language learning motivation.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Explored in this paper are the level and causes of writing anxiety, the level of language learning motivation, the desirable components of the English subject, and the relationship between writing anxiety and language learning motivation. The findings seem to describe the two affective variables, writing anxiety and motivation, as integrally tied variables that altogether affect language learning and also as independently intertwined components that affect each other. This suggests that in order to make English writing successful, English teachers should explore first the writing anxiety of learners as well as their language learning motivation to serve as benchmark for better teaching and learning of English composition writing. Moreover, there is a need for English teachers to address issues in relation to teaching writing: (i) the unreasonably high regard for the language forms (i.e. grammar, vocabulary), which can cause pressure and discouragement to learners; (ii) the classroom environment uncondusive to students' writing skills development due to inappropriate feedback and unfriendly criticisms from both teachers and classmates; and (iii) the uninterestingness and irrelevance of writing topics assigned for students to write about. These concerns can be addressed through proper planning and tailor-fitting of writing tasks and classroom environment in according to the needs of the students. In addition, motivation should not only be seen as an inevitable part of the delivery of the lesson, but also a significant ingredient for an inclusive, noteworthy, and effective language learning. Teachers are recommended to apply communicative tasks frequently so that students become active participants in the learning process, which is one way to increase their motivation.

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Biography



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