

Correlation between Writing Anxiety and Writing Ability in Report Text Writing among Eleventh-Grade EFL Students

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Abstrak

Writing anxiety is often regarded as an affective barrier that can influence how well EFL students perform in writing tasks, particularly in report text, a genre that demands formal structure, factual accuracy, and objective language. This study investigated the correlation between writing anxiety and writing ability in report text among Grade XI students at a public senior high school in Mojokerto Regency, Indonesia. A quantitative correlational design was applied to 108 students selected through convenience sampling from a population of 432 Grade XI students. Data were collected using an adapted *Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI)* and a report text writing test scored with a five-aspect analytical rubric, both validated through expert judgment, pilot testing, item validity analysis, and reliability testing. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, a linearity test, and Pearson Product-Moment correlation were used to analyze the correlation of the data. Findings showed that students' writing anxiety was in the moderate category ($M = 66.13$, $SD = 12.32$) and was dominated by cognitive anxiety, while their writing ability was in the good category ($M = 67.38$, $SD = 8.90$), with grammar as the weakest-scored aspect. A statistically significant negative correlation was found between writing anxiety and writing ability ($r = -0.280$, $p = 0.003$), although the relationship was weak, explaining only 7.84% of the variance. These results suggest that lowering evaluative pressure during writing instruction may help improve students' writing outcomes.

Keywords: *writing anxiety; writing ability; report text; EFL students; correlational study*

Introduction

Writing is one of the four core language skills and is widely considered the most cognitively demanding, since it requires learners to plan ideas, organize content, and apply accurate grammar and vocabulary at the same time, without the immediate feedback available in spoken interaction (Harmer, 2007). Within the Indonesian senior high school curriculum, students are required to master several genre-based text types, one of which is report text, an academic genre used to present factual, objective information about a phenomenon or object through a general classification followed by a systematic description (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). Because report text depends on precise scientific vocabulary, consistent use of the present tense, and formal register, it places heavier linguistic demands on EFL learners than more familiar genres such as recount or narrative.

Alongside these linguistic demands, writing is also shaped by affective factors, and writing anxiety is one of the most frequently reported barriers to successful second language writing. Horwitz et al. (2012) describe anxiety as arising when learners feel unable to meet the linguistic demands of a foreign-language task, while Cheng (2004) operationalizes second language writing anxiety through the *Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI)*, which distinguishes three dimensions: somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, and avoidance behaviour. Prior research conducted with Indonesian eleventh-grade students found that concern over using correct expressions and sentence patterns was the strongest anxiety trigger, indicating that fear of linguistic inaccuracy is central to how EFL students in this age group experience writing anxiety (Janu & Putra, 2024). A broad meta-analysis of 84 effect sizes further confirmed that writing anxiety carries a moderate negative correlation with writing ability across diverse EFL contexts ($r = -0.360$), reinforcing that this relationship is not confined to a single setting (Li, 2022).

At SMAN 1 Bangsal, Mojokerto Regency, students are introduced to report text writing from Grade X onward under the genre-based approach of the Kurikulum Merdeka, yet classroom observation and prior research at this school suggest that anxiety continues to affect students' productive language performance. A qualitative study conducted at the same school found that eleventh-grade students experienced considerable speaking anxiety, manifested cognitively, physically, and behaviourally, and concluded that anxiety functions as a major obstacle in productive language use (Putri, 2024). However, that study addressed speaking anxiety through a purely descriptive qualitative design and did not examine writing anxiety as a distinct construct, nor did it test any statistical relationship between anxiety and measurable performance. Existing Indonesian studies on writing anxiety, meanwhile, have concentrated mainly on university students producing essays or journal manuscripts (Pratiwi & Syarfi, 2023; Ulya et al., 2025) or on vocational-track descriptive writing (Pramudita, 2024), leaving report text writing at the senior high school level largely unexplored.

This gap is significant because report text imposes a genre-specific combination of demands-factual precision, formal register, and rigid grammatical conventions- that differ from the essay and descriptive tasks examined in earlier research, and because no prior study has combined a validated writing anxiety instrument with an objective writing assessment at SMAN 1 Bangsal. The present study examines the correlation between writing anxiety and writing ability in report text among Grade XI EFL students at this school. By answering those questions, this study extends the local research base initiated by Putri (2024) from speaking into writing, while offering genre-specific empirical evidence that can inform how teachers manage the affective dimension of report text instruction. Theoretically, the findings contribute context-specific evidence to the broader discussion of how writing anxiety operates across genres and educational levels; practically, they are expected to inform more responsive, anxiety-aware writing instruction for senior high school English teachers.

Literature Review

Writing is a productive skill that involves planning, composing, revising, and producing a coherent text, and requires not only linguistic accuracy but also awareness of communicative purpose and audience (Harmer, 2007; Hyland, 2007). Within genre-based pedagogy, writing tasks are differentiated by their communicative goal and structural convention, and report text belongs to the academic, genre-based category that requires scientific vocabulary, passive and relational structures, and a two-stage organization moving from general classification to detailed description (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). This structural rigidity makes report text a demanding but useful genre

for assessing EFL learners' academic writing competence, since it requires the simultaneous control of content accuracy, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics (Brown, 2004).

Writing anxiety, in contrast, is an affective factor defined as the fear, tension, or discomfort a learner experiences when facing a writing task, to the point that writing is perceived as threatening rather than communicative (Daly & Miller, 1975). Cheng (2004) operationalizes this construct through the SLWAI, which measures three dimensions: somatic anxiety (physical tension), cognitive anxiety (worry and fear of evaluation), and avoidance behaviour (tendency to delay or evade writing), and which has become the most widely used instrument for measuring writing-specific anxiety in EFL contexts due to its demonstrated validity and reliability. Krashen's (1982) *Affective Filter Hypothesis* offers a theoretical explanation for why these three dimensions matter: negative emotions such as anxiety function as a filter that blocks language input and output from being processed effectively, even when the learner already possesses the relevant linguistic knowledge. This principle helps explain why anxious students may underperform relative to their actual competence.

Empirical findings on the relationship between writing anxiety and writing ability vary considerably across contexts. At the meta-analytic level, Li (2022) found a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.360$) between writing anxiety and writing ability across 84 effect sizes, while individual studies range from a strong positive correlation among Indonesian undergraduate essay writers ($r = 0.717$) (Pratiwi & Syarfi, 2023) to non-significant associations among university-level descriptive writers (Sofia, 2020) and vocational high school students (Pramudita, 2024). Cognitive anxiety, specifically fear of negative evaluation and grammatical error, has repeatedly emerged as the dominant and most performance-relevant dimension across Indonesian and international EFL samples alike (Janu & Putra, 2024; Yu & Zhou, 2022; Rasool & Qian, 2002; Nisa et al., 2024).

This body of research nonetheless leaves a clear gap. Most Indonesian studies have targeted university students or descriptive/essay writing tasks, and the only study conducted at SMAN 1 Bangsal itself examined speaking anxiety through a qualitative design, without measuring writing anxiety or its statistical relationship with performance (Putri, 2024). No identified study has examined writing anxiety specifically in relation to report text, a genre mandated by the Indonesian national curriculum with distinct structural and linguistic conventions. The present study addresses this gap by applying the validated, contextually adapted SLWAI (Cheng, 2004) alongside an analytical writing rubric (Brown, 2004) to examine, quantitatively, how writing anxiety correlates with report text writing ability among Grade XI EFL students, extending the descriptive groundwork laid by Janu & Putra (2024) and the local context established by Putri (2024).

Research Method

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between writing anxiety (independent variable) and writing ability in report text (dependent variable) among Grade XI students at SMAN 1 Bangsal, Mojokerto Regency, without manipulating either variable (Creswell, [year not stated in source list]). From a population of 432 Grade XI students, 108 students from three classes were selected through convenience sampling, a choice made necessary by scheduling constraints and supported by the researcher's prior familiarity with the site through a teaching internship; this sample size exceeds the minimum of 30-50 participants recommended for correlational research (Cohen & Manion, 2018). Writing anxiety was measured using a report-text-contextualized adaptation of Cheng's (2004) 22-item *Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI)*, covering somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, and avoidance behaviour on a five-point Likert scale (total score range 22-110). Writing ability was measured through a 60-minute report text writing test on the topic of predatory animals, scored by a single rater using a five-aspect

analytical rubric adapted from Brown (2004): content (30%), organization (20%), vocabulary (20%), grammar (20%), and mechanics (10%), yielding a final score on a 0-100 scale.

Both instruments underwent expert judgment, empirical pilot testing on 32 students at a comparable but separate school, item validity analysis using corrected item-total Pearson correlation, and reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha, before being re-validated on the main sample of 108 students. Before hypothesis testing, the data were examined for normality using the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, appropriate for the sample size of this study (Cohen & Manion, 2018), and for linearity using the Test for Linearity procedure in SPSS 27, examining the significance of the Deviation from Linearity statistic; the results are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Once both assumptions were satisfied, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was applied at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ to test the hypothesis that a significant correlation exists between writing anxiety and writing ability, with the correlation coefficient interpreted using Cohen and Manion's (2018)

Results and Discussion

Writing Anxiety Level

Students' writing anxiety was measured using the 22-item SLWAI, with total scores ranging from 22 to 110. Results showed that participants' scores ranged from 27 to 95 ($M = 66.13$, $SD = 12.32$), placing the sample as a whole in the moderate writing anxiety category. As shown in Table 4, cognitive anxiety recorded the highest mean relative to its maximum possible score ($M = 25.00$, $SD = 5.36$, 62.5%), followed by somatic anxiety ($M = 22.19$, $SD = 4.56$, 63.4%) and avoidance behaviour ($M = 18.94$, $SD = 4.13$, 54.1%).

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Writing Anxiety by Dimension ($N = 108$)

Dimension	M	SD	Min	Max	% of Max
Somatic Anxiety (7 items)	22.19	4.56	8	32	63.4%
Cognitive Anxiety (8 items)	25.00	5.36	11	35	62.5%
Avoidance Behavior (7 items)	18.94	4.13	7	31	54.1%

At the categorical level, the majority of students ($n = 72$; 66.7%) fell into the moderate writing anxiety category, 26 students (24.1%) into the low category, and 10 students (9.3%) into the high category (Table 5). When the dominant dimension was identified for each individual, cognitive anxiety was dominant for 80 students (74.1%), somatic anxiety for 26 students (24.1%), and avoidance behaviour for only 2 students (1.9%), confirming that evaluative worry, rather than physical tension or task avoidance, is the primary form writing anxiety takes in this sample.

Table 5. Distribution of Writing Anxiety Categories

Category	Score Range	n	%
Low	22-59	26	24.1
Moderate	60-80	72	66.7
High	81-110	10	9.3
Total	-	108	100.0

Writing Ability Level

Writing ability, assessed through the report text writing test, produced an overall mean score of 67.38 (SD = 8.90; range 47-85), placing the sample in the good category. As shown in Table 6, vocabulary recorded the highest mean among the five aspects (M = 3.46), suggesting relative strength in scientific and topic-related word choice, while grammar recorded the lowest mean (M = 3.25), reflecting persistent difficulty with tense consistency, relational verbs, and sentence accuracy.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Writing Ability by Aspect (N = 108)

Aspect	Weight	M	Min	Max	Note
Content	30%	3.36	2.0	4.5	Second lowest
Organization	20%	3.40	2.0	4.5	-
Vocabulary	20%	3.46	2.0	4.5	Highest
Grammar	20%	3.25	2.0	4.5	Lowest
Mechanics	10%	3.48	2.5	5.0	-
Final Score	-	67.38	47	85	Good category

At the categorical level, 46 students (42.6%) scored in the good-to-excellent range, while the remaining 62 students (57.4%) scored fair or below (Table 7), indicating that more than half of the sample has not yet reached a fully satisfactory level of report text competence. Grammar's position as the weakest aspect is consistent with the genre's demands: report text requires sustained, consistent use of the simple present tense and relational verbs, features that have no direct morphological equivalent in Indonesian and are therefore a persistent source of difficulty for Indonesian EFL learners at this level.

Table 7. Distribution of Writing Ability Categories

Category	Score Range	n	%
Excellent	80-100	12	11.1
Good	70-79	34	31.5
Fair	60-69	42	38.9
Poor	50-59	18	16.7
Very Poor	< 50	2	1.9
Total	-	108	100.0

Correlation between Writing Anxiety and Writing Ability

Prerequisite testing confirmed that the data satisfied both the normality assumption (Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic = 0.053, $p = 0.200$) and the linearity assumption (Deviation from Linearity $F = 0.915$, $p = 0.608$; Linearity $F = 8.744$, $p = 0.004$), justifying the use of Pearson Product-Moment correlation. As presented in Table 3, the analysis yielded $r = -0.280$ ($p = 0.003$, $p < 0.01$, $N = 108$), indicating a statistically significant negative correlation: as students' writing anxiety increases, their writing ability tends to decrease. The null hypothesis (H_0) was therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) accepted, though the coefficient of -0.280 falls in the weak range, meaning writing anxiety accounts for only about 7.84% of the variance in writing ability (r^2), leaving most of the variance explained by factors outside the scope of this study, most plausibly self-efficacy, motivation, and prior writing experience, as noted in the Conclusion.

This pattern becomes clearer when the dimension-specific data are considered together. Students whose anxiety was dominated by cognitive worry, the largest group in this sample, showed their clearest weaknesses in grammar and content, consistent with Krashen's (1982) *Affective Filter Hypothesis*: evaluative worry appears to occupy cognitive resources that would otherwise support accurate sentence construction and idea development, even when the underlying grammatical knowledge is present. Vocabulary, retrieved more automatically from memory, was comparatively

less affected by this evaluative pressure. Students whose anxiety was primarily somatic showed weaker organization and mechanics, plausibly because physical tension disrupts the sustained, step-by-step thinking that the report text's two-stage structure (classification followed by description) requires. The small avoidance-dominant subgroup reported the lowest anxiety levels overall, yet produced comparatively weak content and vocabulary, suggesting that avoidance functions as a coping strategy that reduces felt anxiety in the short term while still limiting writing quality (Daly & Miller, 1975).

These findings both confirm and refine earlier research. The negative direction of the relationship is consistent with Li's (2022) meta-analytic conclusion and with findings from university-level EFL samples (Kamran et al., 2026), and the dominance of cognitive anxiety mirrors both Cheng's (2004) original conceptualization and Janu and Putra's (2024) finding that concern over linguistic accuracy is the central anxiety issue for Indonesian eleventh-grade students. However, the correlation found in this study ($r = -0.280$) is noticeably weaker than Li's (2022) meta-analytic average ($r = -0.360$), a gap plausibly explained by report text's structured, formulaic genre: because students already possess a clear schema for how the text should be organized, this structure may partly offset the disorganization that typically accompanies anxiety in less-structured writing tasks. This finding also contrasts with Pratiwi and Syarfi's strong positive correlation among university essay writers and with the non-significant results reported by Sofia (2020) and Pramudita (2024), reinforcing that the strength and even the direction of the anxiety-performance relationship is highly sensitive to genre, educational level, and testing conditions rather than being a fixed, universal effect. Finally, because the only prior study conducted at this school addressed speaking anxiety through a qualitative design (Putri, 2024), the present findings extend the local research base from speaking into writing and provide the first quantitative, genre-specific evidence of how writing anxiety operates among SMAN 1 Bangsal students.

Taken together, these results indicate that writing anxiety is a real but modest contributor to reported text writing ability among Grade XI EFL students at SMAN 1 Bangsal, operating most strongly through the cognitive dimension and most visibly through grammar and content. Because the relationship is only weak-to-moderate in strength, writing instruction should not treat anxiety reduction as sufficient on its own; rather, it should be combined with genre-specific grammar and content support, since other factors such as self-efficacy, motivation, and prior writing experience evidently account for a substantial share of the remaining variance in writing performance (Saifulloh, 2026; Saifulloh et al., 2023, 2026; Saifulloh, Retnaningdyah, & Mustofa, 2025b, 2025c, 2025a; Saifulloh, Retnaningdyah, Mustofa, et al., 2025; Saifulloh & Anam, 2022). A further limitation of this study is that writing ability was scored by a single rater without a second, independent scorer, so inter-rater reliability could not be established; future replications should incorporate multiple raters to strengthen the validity of the writing-ability measure.

Conclusion

This study examined the correlation between writing anxiety and writing ability in report text writing among 108 Grade XI EFL students at SMAN 1 Bangsal. Students' writing anxiety was predominantly moderate ($M = 66.13$), driven mainly by cognitive anxiety, while their writing ability averaged 67.38, in the good category, with grammar as the weakest aspect. Pearson correlation analysis confirmed a statistically significant negative correlation between the two variables ($r = -0.280, p = 0.003$): students with higher writing anxiety tended to produce lower-quality report texts, although anxiety accounted for only a small proportion of the variance (7.84%). These findings suggest that reducing evaluative pressure, for example through low-stakes writing practice, structured pre-writing activities, and process-oriented feedback focused on grammar, may help

improve students' report text writing outcomes, while also pointing to the need for future research using longitudinal designs, multiple predictors such as self-efficacy and motivation, replication across other genres and school contexts, and multiple independent raters to establish inter-rater reliability.

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