

Factors causing writing apprehension among English-majored students

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ABSTRACT: *Research on English writing skills has been a significant focus in the field of English language teaching and learning. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of writing skills in language acquisition, while also highlighting the challenges students face in developing these skills. This study takes a fresh perspective by investigating the level of apprehension in essay writing and identifying factors that negatively impact the English writing abilities of English-major students at a university in Ho Chi Minh City. A total of 135 third-year English-major students completed a questionnaire, and 10 students participated in semi-structured interviews. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the questionnaire data using SPSS. The findings revealed a relatively high level of essay writing apprehension among third-year English-major students. The study further identified various factors, including teachers, students, and the course itself, that contribute to this apprehension. The data from the semi-structured interviews provided additional insights to support these findings. Based on the study's outcomes, recommendations are offered to enhance the teaching and learning of writing skills.*

KEYWORDS: Factors, English essay writing, English-majored students, tertiary level, writing apprehension.

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1. Introduction

Writing is a crucial skill that second or foreign-language learners need to master, yet it is widely acknowledged as one of the most challenging skills to acquire. Effective writing involves encoding intended meaning through graphic symbols or letters, requiring a solid grasp of sentence structures, vocabulary, and subject-specific information. Furthermore, writers should possess the skills to organize their thoughts into coherent paragraphs or essays.

Proficiency in writing is essential for students across all fields of study, as it greatly impacts success in higher education and future careers (Geiser & Studley, 2001; Pratiwi, 2020; Wischgoll, 2017). Additionally, improved writing abilities are considered a reliable indicator of the value added through higher education. In today's knowledge-based economy, written documents codify a significant portion of a company's value, underscoring the importance of a literate workforce. However, the writing process, as

described by Zamel (1993), is nonlinear and iterative, with writers discovering and generating ideas as they strive to convey meaning. Planning, data collection, drafting, revision, rewriting, and editing are all integral components of this dynamic and non-sequential process, devoid of rigid phases. Vietnamese English students often encounter significant difficulties with their writing skills, including writing apprehension, which will be the focus of this article. To address these issues, it is crucial to identify the underlying causes of writing obstacles and offer solutions to enhance students' confidence in their writing abilities. This study aims to assess the level of writing apprehension among English-major students at NL University (NLU), while also exploring the contributing factors. The specific objectives of this study are as follows: (1) to determine the extent of writing apprehension among English-major students at NLU; (2) to investigate the factors causing writing apprehension among English-major students at NLU. To achieve these

objectives, the following research questions have been formulated:

What is the level of writing apprehension among English-major students at NLU?

What factors contribute to writing apprehension among English-major students at NLU?

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of writing apprehension

According to Madjid (2020), writing apprehension refers to the anxiety experienced by students due to negative feelings about their writing skills. Writing fears are a significant issue that can hinder the performance of both native and non-native students. Many students find the term "writing apprehension" complex and confusing (Al-Sobh & Al-Abed, 2012; Holmes et al., 2018). The fear of writing encompasses various experiences. Firstly, it involves a writer's reluctance to start writing or using writing as a means to avoid interruptions. Secondly, it encompasses the negative attitudes writers hold towards writing, often downplaying its importance. Moreover, a writer's negative mindset can lead to overall nervousness and disruption during the creative process (Valarino, 2002). Additionally, writers often experience apprehension through emotional agitation or suppression. Despite the absence of a definitive solution to address writers' fear of writing, their anxiety and negative attitudes persist, causing some projects to remain unfinished.

2.2. Characteristics of writing apprehension

Writing apprehension is a specific type of anxiety related to writing, characterized by avoidance behaviors and a potential impact on writing evaluation (Hassan, 2001). The second language writing anxiety inventory (SLWAI), developed by Cheng (2004) and Fischer (2017), is a multidimensional scale that assesses L2 writing anxiety across three dimensions: somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, and avoidance behavior. Somatic anxiety refers to the subjective experience of anxiety, including feelings of stress and unease. Cognitive anxiety involves low expectations, excessive focus on performance,

and concerns about how others perceive one's writing. Avoidance behavior refers to actively avoiding writing tasks. Notably, cognitive factors, rather than somatic factors or avoidance behaviors, have been found to be negatively correlated with L2 writing performance.

Furthermore, research has identified commonalities between writing anxiety and other forms of second language anxiety. For example, Ahrens et al. (2016) discovered that anxious writers often prefer academic pursuits unrelated to writing over taking writing classes. Recent studies have also revealed negative correlations between various measures of writing anxiety and writing performance. Hassan (2001) found that students with low anxiety produced better quality components and wrote more than high-anxiety students, using writing quality and quantity tasks. Additionally, time pressure can contribute to writing apprehension among anxious writers (Kean et al., 1987; Rasool et al., 2023). Rohmah (2020) emphasized that anxiety affects writing processes and behaviors through cognitive interference, writing avoidance, and physiological factors manifesting as uncomfortable tension. They also identified a significant negative correlation between specific writing anxiety and writing performance, as measured by participants' performance on timed English essay writing tasks.

2.3. Factors causing writing apprehension

Writing is a cognitive and emotional process that involves thinking and feeling. When it comes to writing in a second or foreign language, it is influenced by various factors, including social and cultural aspects, as well as student characteristics. These factors encompass university requirements, societal expectations, evaluation procedures, learner beliefs, motivation, language proficiency, gender, and even the duration of a student's university experience (Qadir et al., 2021). Consequently, the reasons behind writing anxiety can be diverse, ranging from personal factors like self-confidence to procedural factors like classroom activities, as supported by previous research on L2 writing anxiety. A significant factor contributing to second language writing

anxiety is the fear of failure in academic settings. Time pressure also plays a crucial role in writing, as even highly capable and well-prepared students often make more errors when writing under time constraints. The fear of negative writing evaluation extends beyond test anxiety, encompassing personal and academic assessments based on students' language proficiency and their ability to express themselves effectively and academically (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Yanti, 2022). Regardless of someone's writing skills and capabilities, if they believe they will perform poorly or lack interest in taking a writing course, their anxiety can hinder their performance (Defazio et al., 2010). Thus, a lack of self-confidence in writing in the second language emerges as a contributing factor to L2 writing anxiety among students.

Previous studies have identified factors such as time limitations, writing topics, and language proficiency as crucial elements of ESL writing anxiety (Hyland, 2003; Leki & Carson, 1997; Shenhzadi & Krishnasamy, 2018). Undergraduates often perceive language difficulties, such as limited vocabulary and grammar proficiency, as their primary challenges in English composition, leading to frustration when expressing their thoughts effectively and academically (Hyland, 2003). Affective responses of language learners to writing tasks can also be influenced by the level and specificity of knowledge assumed or required of them (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). It is generally expected that writers with sufficient relevant knowledge will demonstrate better performance in writing tasks, while those lacking such knowledge may experience anxiety. Additionally, the feedback writers receive regarding the quality of their writing directly affects their emotions (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Daskan & Yildiz, 2020; Yildiz, 2020). Positive feedback that is relevant, comprehensive, and effective can enhance writing performance and alleviate writing anxiety.

2.4. Most typical types of writing apprehension

Zhang (2011) conducted a study on two groups of Chinese students majoring in English, consisting of 49 freshmen and 147 sophomores.

The findings revealed that the participants experienced different types of anxiety and adopted various coping strategies. Cognitive anxiety (CA) was the most frequently experienced type of anxiety. Rezaei and Jafari (2014) also investigated the causes of anxiety among 120 EFL students in Iran, employing quantitative research methods. The researchers used three questionnaires to collect data. Both groups of students experienced ESL writing anxiety due to multiple factors, with linguistic difficulties, inadequate writing practice, test anxiety, and lack of specific knowledge being the most common factors. Maliki (2018) further suggested that fear of negative evaluations contributes to writing anxiety. The study found that 27 Iranian EFL students who knew their writing would not be graded exhibited lower levels of anxiety and nervousness. Rahim and Hayas (2014) approached L2 writing anxiety from a different perspective, examining how it influenced students' choices in completing writing assignments. The questionnaire results showed that a high percentage of learners (87%) experienced cognitive anxiety (CA), somatic anxiety (SA), and avoidance anxiety (AA), which corroborated Shang's (2013) findings. Students' decision to complete the writing task was influenced by all three types of anxiety, with approximately 43% exhibiting high levels of SA and 50% exhibiting high levels of CA. Those experiencing CA and SA often chose not to complete the writing task due to concerns about how their writing would be perceived by teachers and peers. Conversely, individuals experiencing only minimal levels of each anxiety type considered additional writing practice as a means of improving their English writing skills. The study's reliability was enhanced by the utilization of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Öztürk and Saydam (2014) examined the self-efficacy and L2 writing anxiety of EFL Turkish students. Their study, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research methods with 240 participants (109 males and 121 females), found that only 14% of the students were classified as low-anxious learners. The majority of students (approximately one-third) were considered highly anxious.

Gender differences were observed, with female participants exhibiting higher levels of anxiety. Proficiency levels (beginner, elementary, and intermediate) showed minimal differences. The study also identified factors contributing to anxiety, including fear of negative evaluation, unfamiliarity with the topic, writing ability, vocabulary limitations, and achieving flawless writing.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research site

This research was conducted at NLU, which was established in 1955 with the aim of providing high-quality education and fostering integration with the international community. The university comprises a main campus spanning 118 hectares and two sub-campuses. Over its 66-year history, NLU has evolved into a multidisciplinary institution. Currently, NLU offers 62 undergraduate, 16 master's, and 12 doctoral programs. The university has an enrollment of approximately 20,000 students. NLU has forged strong partnerships with over 140 universities, research institutes, and non-governmental organizations in the United States, Australia, Japan, Taiwan, and various ASEAN countries, fostering educational exchange programs and collaborative research projects.

3.2. Participants

The population for this study consisted of 135 adult university students who were enrolled in the writing course. The focus of the study was on third-year English-majored students at NLU, as the researcher believed that this group had a high level of familiarity with writing subjects. Third-year students were specifically chosen for their enrollment in a writing course that aligned with the objectives of the study. Convenience sampling was employed to select participants from the classes. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 23, with an average age of 21.

3.3. Research instruments

A mixed-method design was employed in this study, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The data collection involved the use

of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as research instruments.

The questionnaire design was based on the theoretical framework, which is an effective tool for examining the education sector. To optimize cost and data processing efficiency, closed-ended questions were utilized. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: general participant information, students' writing apprehension, and factors contributing to their fear of writing.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of students' writing anxiety and its contributing factors. The interview questions were divided into two parts, A and B, aligning with the research objectives and relevant literature. Part A focused on gathering background information from the interviewees, while Part B consisted of discussion questions. The students' responses in Vietnamese were subsequently translated into English by the researcher for analysis and interpretation.

3.4. Data collection procedures

The data collection for this study occurred in two stages. Firstly, the researcher conducted interviews with English-major students during their break time, aiming to collect quantitative data through the use of questionnaires. Prior to conducting the research, permission was sought from the school administration. Subsequently, the questionnaires were distributed to the students, who were requested to respond to them. As for the interviews, ten students were gathered in their classroom to complete the questionnaires. The researcher provided assistance and explanations for any questions that the students found unclear.

3.5. Data analysis procedures

Two types of data were used in this study, as discussed in the methodology section: quantitative and qualitative data. Using SPSS, the researcher analyzed the questionnaire's data using descriptive statistics. Mean scores, standard deviation, and percentages were determined through this analysis.

Content analysis was utilized for the purpose of analyzing the interview data. All of the data

that were collected were categorized or divided into various topics that were related to the variables of the study.

4. Findings

4.1. The writing apprehension among English-majored students

The data displayed in Table 1 shows that the writing apprehension among the English-majored students is rather high ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.824$). It means that students' writing apprehension was relatively positive.

More specifically, the results of the study reveal that the majority of students reported that they felt worried about other people's comments on their English composition (item 11: $M = 3.91$; $SD = 0.842$). Besides, they accepted that they refused teachers' requirement to write in English (item 10: $M = 3.84$; $SD = 0.845$). It is clear that many students felt afraid when their compositions were poorly graded (item 14: $M = 3.76$; $SD = 0.866$). Furthermore, there was another worry coming from students who had their compositions as the sample (item 13: $M = 3.74$; $SD = 0.846$). Truly speaking, most of the students felt uneasy when their compositions were evaluated by the others (item 3: $M = 3.73$; $SD = 0.899$). Further to this, it was so common when students admitted that they were afraid when their compositions were much worse than others (item 5: $M = 3.72$; $SD = 0.755$). Concerning their teachers' requirement for writing in English, students said that their minds always went blank when being asked to write in front of the class (item 9: $M = 3.70$; $SD = 0.703$). It was because students tended to feel tense writing in English (item 12: $M = 3.67$; $SD = 0.801$). Moreover, students also admitted that they always tried not to involve in writing English composition (item 4: $M = 3.65$; $SD = 0.858$). For this reason, students also tried not to use English writing in most situations (item 7: $M = 3.64$; $SD = 0.787$). Students felt nervous and their hearts pounding when there was limited time to complete a writing task (items 1 & 2: $M = 3.50$ & 3.56 ; $SD = 0.800$ & 0.807). What is more, they also felt afraid when having bad grades in English writing class (item 6: $M = 3.47$; $SD = 0.904$).

To sum up, writing caused a lot of concern for English majors. The majority of students said that they felt uneasy when asked to write in English when their work was assessed and presented as an example, when it was given a low mark, and when their grades for English writing were low. When their professors assigned them writing projects in English, they also made an effort to avoid doing them since they regularly suffered from mental health concerns.

The writing was chosen by all of the students who took part in the interviews as the EFL skill that most worried them. The reasons for this included a lack of sufficient vocabulary and muddled grammar structures, which led to ongoing writing difficulty. For instance, some students reluctantly admitted:

"Because it is complicated to complete a writing exercise." (S2); *"because it requires you to have a variety of vocabularies and know how to apply correct grammar."* (S3); *"When I was in high school, this skill was not taken seriously. The academic curriculum only focused on grammar, so when I got into college and got asked to handle a writing assignment, I got panic. Until now, writing is still the skill I am scared of the most."* (S4); *"because writing skill is very difficult for students. Most of my classmates received low marks for writing assignments and were not confident writing in English."* (S5); *"I cannot combine ideas or transcribe my thoughts into written format."* (S6).

The findings were also in line with those from the interviews. When faced with a writing assignment, eight out of ten of the students interviewed admitted to having an inferiority complex, stating:

"I feel anxious because I do not know exactly how to write a composition, I do not have enough words, ideas, and I am fearful of grammar" (S2); *"I am not confident because I study badly at writing skill."* (S4); *"I feel flutter because I do not have enough words or vocabularies to back up my writing."* (S7); *"I feel nervous while writing in English. I would never do it voluntarily. I only do it when being asked."* (S10)

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the level of writing apprehension among English-majored students

No.	Items	Mean	SD
1	I feel nervous while writing in English.	3.50	.800
2	I feel my heart pounding when there is limited time to complete a writing task.	3.56	.807
3	Knowing that my composition will be evaluated makes me feel worried and uneasy.	3.73	.899
4	I try not to involve in writing English compositions.	3.65	.858
5	I am afraid that my English compositions are much worse than others.	3.72	.775
6	I am afraid of having bad grades in English writing class.	3.47	.904
7	I try my best not to use English writing in any situation.	3.64	.787
8	I felt embarrassed when my friends read my English composition.	3.47	.809
9	My mind went blank when I suddenly asked to write in English.	3.70	.703
10	I tried to find reasons to refuse when the teacher asked me to write in English.	3.84	.845
11	I am worried about other people's comments on my English compositions.	3.91	.842
12	I am tense writing in English.	3.67	.801
13	I am not confident when my English composition is used as the sample.	3.74	.846
14	I am afraid that my English compositions are poorly graded.	3.76	.866
Total		3.67	.824

According to the survey, students majoring in English felt guilty and embarrassed when they had to listen to other people's evaluations of their writing, which was ranked third (Item 11: $M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.842$). It suggests that the majority of respondents to the survey are on

board. Processing feedback from others, whether positive or negative, is difficult. Through a variety of interviews, the students offered more in-depth explanations. First and foremost, students frequently feel inferior to their peers, especially when it comes to a skill like writing that requires a lot of knowledge, hard work, and natural talent. Students frequently resent asking friends for praise or criticism as a result. Second, a few students asserted that the instructor would be of greater assistance to them than their classmates.

"[...] but I do not particularly appreciate receiving comments from friends or classmates. I like my friends, but I think the teachers will give me better feedback. (S2); "Two things: Making many mistakes and having my writing shown to others." (S3); "[...] My friends are good at writing, so I feel ashamed compared to them." (S7); "[...] I do not think my friends fully understand what I want to write, so they cannot provide me with thorough feedback." (S8).

The following highest mean (item 10: $M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.845$) belongs to item 10, which refers to students' reflective refusal when asked to write anything in English. This indicates that even though these students have majored in English, they frequently withdraw and participate in any written activities voluntarily. The most common reasons for the aforementioned behaviour are a lack of vocabulary and a poor grasp of fundamental concepts and grammar. The majority of students who took part in the interviews admitted that they were unable to voluntarily write a full paragraph due to a lack of vocabulary and particular practical application of grammar. In the meantime, some students stated that they did have a lot of ideas but were unsure how to arrange them.

"I do not have enough ideas for my writing, [...] therefore, I would never volunteer to do a writing assignment." (S2); "Once, my teacher ordered me to come to the board, I just sat there. Hopefully, he thought I was not in class. My grammar level is horrible. I would have embarrassed myself up there." (S3); "I would never volunteer to submit my writing because first, I do not have an

adequate number of vocabularies; second, I have problems organizing ideas.” (S4); “Not having enough ideas for my writing is the problem.” (S9); “I have difficulty in finding topics and ideas.” (S10)

Time limitation is one of the lowest mean scores given in the survey (item 2: M = 3.56, S = 0.807). The time limit is supposed to help students write better. Science has demonstrated that when subjected to time or environmental pressure, people typically perform better. However, time constraints actually cause stress and stuckness for students learning English as a second language.

“Time for writing is not enough to practice in class. Sometimes, I get stressed just by looking at the time limit. I think if I get better at writing, the fear will go away.” (S3); “I do not think there is enough time for the teacher to teach us sufficient writing technique. However, when we take the writing test, there is a time limit which is odd to me.” (S4); “It is stressful, you know, especially when the teacher asks me to think of something to write on the spot within 10 or 20 minutes.” (S6).

4.2. Factors causing writing apprehension

The data in Table 2 below shows the psychological reasons causing writing fear among English-majored students. The reasons detail the factors that prevent the student from completing a written assignment. The table interpreted those factors had a high impact on students’ writing apprehension (M = 3.71; SD = 0.454). The single most striking observation to emerge from the data comparison was that course-related were the highest component (Group 3: M = 3.85; SD = 0.355). The following were teacher-related factors (Group 2: M = 3.80; SD = 0.431). The student-related factor ranked third (Group 1: M = 3.48; SD = 0.577)

Table 2. Factors affecting students’ writing apprehension

No.	Factors	N = 135	
		M	SD
1	Student-related factors	3.48	.577

2	Teacher-related factors	3.80	.431
3	Course-related factors	3.85	.355
	Total	3.71	.454

Note: M: mean; SD: Standard deviation

4.2.1. Student-related factors

In Table 3, the questionnaire consists of 13 items investigating student-related factors. It is evident that students expressed a positive agreement with this factor (M = 3.48; SD = 0.577). The majority of students agreed that their inability to express themselves in English was due to a lack of grammar knowledge (item 11: M = 3.68; SD = 0.555). The results further revealed that students faced challenges in expressing their thoughts and combining ideas when writing (items 5 & 9: M = 3.63; SD = 0.595 & 0.583). Additionally, students often disliked their writing classes (item 6: M = 3.61; SD = 0.646). Some students occasionally felt that their writing skills were not as good as their peers’ (item 10: M = 3.47; SD = 0.731). For personal reasons, students mentioned difficulties in writing due to a lack of writing habit and irregular study habits in this subject (items 2 & 4: M = 3.43 & 3.40; SD = 0.537 & 0.602). Moreover, students agreed that the absence of prior writing courses posed challenges in their writing (item 1: M = 3.38; SD = .568). Furthermore, students acknowledged that their familiarity with organizing ideas and taking tests in Vietnamese hindered their writing ability in English (items 3 & 12: M = 3.35; SD = 0.500 & 0.507). Lastly, a few students attributed their writing boredom to their uninspiring teacher (item 13: M = 3.33; SD = 0.528).

In summary, concerning student-related factors, it is evident that the majority of students agreed that their challenges in English writing stemmed from a lack of language proficiency and difficulty in organizing their thoughts. Moreover, they occasionally disliked their English writing classes and had a tendency to compare their writing with that of their peers. Students cited personal reasons such as a lack of writing habit, absence of prior writing courses, and dissatisfaction with their teacher as additional obstacles to their writing. Furthermore, their familiarity with organizing thoughts and taking

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of student-related factors

No.	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	I have difficulty in writing because I did not take a writing course before.	135	3.38	.568
2	I have difficulty in this course because I do not have a writing habit.	135	3.43	.537
3	I have difficulty in writing because I am used to taking tests.	135	3.35	.500
4	I am not successful because I do not study regularly for writing courses.	135	3.40	.602
5	I cannot express what I think.	135	3.63	.595
6	I do not like writing classes.	135	3.61	.646
9	I cannot combine ideas when I write.	135	3.63	.583
10	I do not think I write as well as most other people.	135	3.47	.731
11	I cannot express myself in English because I lack grammar knowledge.	135	3.68	.555
12	I organize my ideas in Vietnamese while writing, so I cannot express them well in English.	135	3.35	.507
13	I get bored because the teacher is boring.	135	3.33	.528
	Total	135	3.48	.577

tests in Vietnamese affected their English writing ability.

Among the twelve listed items, lack of grammar knowledge (item 11: M = 3.68, SD = 0.555) solidified in the first place. Due to their lack of grammar, participants acknowledged that they were unable to express themselves in the most proficient written text. Writing has always been hampered by poor grammar. The majority of students believed that their grammar knowledge was insufficient to create an essay that was grammatically correct. This information from the interview is very similar to the result of this survey, which indicates that many grammar

points need to be understood and applied appropriately in writing.

“I feel anxious because I do not know precisely how to write a composition, I do not have enough words, ideas, and I am fearful of grammar.” (S2); *“I feel anxious because my grammar is not good.”* (S3); *“I feel worried during writing class because I am afraid of grammatical structures.”* (S7)

Another factor lies in students’ incapability to express their train of thought in written format (Item 5: M=3.63, SD=0.595). When students put their thoughts into words, the majority of them were on the same board, as evidenced by the mean score. The results of the interviews’ data collection are also similar. Students shared how difficult it was for them to create visions, organize their thoughts, or begin or finish a piece of writing.

“I think finding and organizing ideas is challenging.” (S2); *“Finding and organizing ideas are two of the most tiresome tasks for me. I cannot combine and develop ideas.”* (S4); *“Finding particular ideas and organizing them troubles me the most, especially if the topic is specific and fixed. I have many ideas lining up, but I could not organize them into words due to my lack of writing capability”* (S6); *“I think finding and organizing ideas are why I fear writing. I do not know to write an interesting and catching introduction. We do not have writing templates for every topic, you know.”* (S9).

The next notable factor is students’ mutual dislike for writing sessions (Item 6: M = 3.61, SD = 0.646). Students elaborated on their dissatisfaction with writing classes during interviews. The majority of respondents stated that their limited English grammar and vocabulary made it difficult for them to keep up with their classmates. Others acknowledged that they only attended classes because they were required to do so or that they only responded when asked.

“I feel anxious because I do not know precisely how to write a composition, I do not have enough words, ideas, and I am fearful of grammar.” (S2); *“I feel anxious because my grammar is not good.”* (S3); *“Writing classes make me anxious and confident if I do not prepare well.”* (S4); *“Not confident because I do poorly at writing skills.”* (S5); *“I feel worried during writing class because*

I am afraid of grammatical structures.” (S8); “I feel anxious because I do not have enough ideas.” (S9); “I feel nervous while writing in English. I would never do it voluntarily. I only do it when being asked.” (S10).

In conclusion, it is possible to draw the conclusion that, out of the various aspects of self-esteem that were mentioned, the three aspects that had the greatest impact on students’ apprehension regarding writing are their lack of knowledge of grammar, their inability to expand on ideas, and their dislike of the writing class.

4.2.2. Teacher-related factors

The data in Table 4 below shows the teacher-related factors causing writing fear among English-majored students. The reasons detail what the teacher could have done that made students lose interest in writing (M = 3.80; SD = 0.431). It means all of the grounds on the list have a high impact on students writing apprehension. Among items of teacher-related factors, students admitted that the teacher always evaluated their writing (item 20: M = 3.94; SD = 0.237). However, the teacher did not give enough examples for them to practice writing (item 18: M = 3.93; SD = 0.263). Besides, the teacher did not direct students to write (item 19: M = 3.91; SD = 0.286). It was obvious that most of the students also said that the teacher did not explain clearly and give essential feedback for students to improve their writing (items 14 & 17: M = 3.87 & 3.66; SD= 0.375 & 0.625). In addition, the teacher did not answer students’ questions (item 16: M = 3.65; SD = 0.615). Regarding the teacher’s teaching method, students also agreed that the teacher taught writing techniques too fast (item 15: M = 3.62; SD = 0.621).

In a nutshell, the majority of students concurred that the instructor was willing to assess their writing. However, the teacher lacked examples, feedback, and a thorough explanation of the lesson, so she was unable to effectively teach students how to improve their writing. Additionally, the instructor instructed the writing technique too quickly.

Among the seven listed items, teachers’ constant assessment (item 20: M=3.94,

SD=0.237) solidified in the first place. The mean score showed that students might feel too stuffed and under pressure during the continuous writing evaluations. Theoretically, teachers can gain a deeper understanding of their students’ abilities through assessments. However, during their interviews, a lot of students said that they were given too much homework and didn’t know enough about writing.

“[...] *In addition, the teacher asked me to write too many assignments and essays. I feel stressed just by thinking of them.*” (S1); “*She constantly tests writing instead of teaches writing.*” (S3); “*She does not explain clearly, and she continually tests writing instead of teaches writing.*” (S4)

The following positions in the list of factors are that the teacher did not provide convincing examples (Item 18: M = 3.93, SD = 0.263), lacked thorough guidance (Item 19: M = 3.91, SD = 0.286), and detailed explanation of errors committed by students their writing assignments (Item 17: M = 3.66, SD = 0.625). This is primarily due to the inadequacy of the NLU classroom model for writing classes. Teachers did not have

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of teacher-related factors

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
14	The teacher does not explain clearly.	135	3.87	.375
15	The teacher instructs writing techniques too fast.	135	3.62	.621
16	The teacher does not answer students’ questions.	135	3.65	.615
17	The teacher does not give feedback on student writing.	135	3.66	.625
18	The teacher does not give enough examples.	135	3.93	.263
19	The teacher does not direct students to write well.	135	3.91	.286
20	The teacher always evaluates our writing.	135	3.94	.237
	Total	135	3.80	.431

enough time to make detailed, individualized assessments that were tailored to each student's writing performance because there were too many students in one class. Some students, for instance, expressed:

"Since there are too many essays submitted to teachers, they cannot thoroughly correct them." (S1); *"Teacher does not explain clearly and does not have enough time to correct all of us."* (S2); *"Sometimes he/she did not correct mistakes."* (S5); *"I think he does not explain clearly, whether it is the topic or what I did wrong. Therefore, I keep making the same mistake."* (S9)

The teacher's overwhelming fast, and confusing instruction takes the last position (Item 15: $M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.621$). Students who took part in the interviews, on the other hand, expressed concern about their teachers' questionable teaching methods, citing them as the primary cause of their falling behind.

"Some of the teachers' teaching methods left me confused about the transferred facts/information or how to organize it appropriately." (S6); *"The teacher instructs writing technique too fast."* (S7)

4.2.3. Course-related factors

The data in Table 5 below shows the course-related factors causing writing fear among English-majored students. The reasons include the students' coursebooks and time limitations in each writing class during a course. All of the listed reasons are in the high mean ($M = 3.85$; $SD = 0.355$). It means all of the grounds on the list have a high impact on students writing apprehension. It is clear that the coursebook contained examples which were not exploratory (item 23: $M = 3.99$; $SD = 0.121$). Therefore, the coursebook did not give enough writing exercises for students to practice (item 24: $M = 3.91$; $SD = 0.286$). Besides that, students also agreed that the coursebook did not have enough examples (item 22: $M = 3.89$; $SD = 0.315$). It was one of the reasons why students said that the coursebook was boring (item 21: $M = 3.81$; $SD = 0.432$). Furthermore, students admitted that the coursebook did not have enough examples for writing (item 22: $M = 3.89$; $SD = .315$).

Regarding time allotted to writing skills and writing topics, students said that it was limited and writing topics were tedious (items 26 & 25: $M = 3.76$; $SD = 0.496$ & 0.482).

In conclusion, the course-related factors included factors that influence students' writing anxiety. The majority of students stated that the coursebook's examples were neither interesting nor exploratory. In addition, there was insufficient practice in the coursebook. Additionally, only a limited amount of time is allotted for each writing task.

The coursebook not being exploratory enough solidified the first place (item 23: $M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.121$). There was no such thing as a perfect textbook; in any case, the chosen one should accomplish what was professed to be. Students with an English major should find enough information, writing templates, and exercises in the coursebook. However, the mean score demonstrated that students were dissatisfied with the content of the current textbook, citing that it was too academic and did not inspire students to write. During the interviews, some of the students expressed:

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of course-related factors

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
21	The coursebook is boring.	135	3.81	.432
22	The coursebook does not contain enough examples for writing.	135	3.89	.315
23	The examples in the coursebook are not exploratory.	135	3.99	.121
24	There are not enough writing exercises in the coursebook.	135	3.91	.286
25	Writing topics in the coursebook is tedious and difficult.	135	3.76	.482
26	The time allotted to writing skills is limited.	135	3.76	.496
	Total	135	3.85	.355

“Sometimes, I am not too fond of the coursebook because it could be a bit dull.” (S4); “It does not include instruction for each topic.” (S5); “I think the writing topics are not enough to excite my writing will. I yawn whenever I open it.” (S10).

The following positions in the textbook-related factors were the lack of provided writing exercises (Item 24: $M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.286$) and practical writing templates (Item 22: $M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.121$). Although the book’s compatibility with writing skills was acknowledged, the majority of students expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of examples in the course textbook to fully comprehend each section. What’s more, its absence of extra practice kept students from training after class.

“The coursebook is suitable for general learning of writing. However, it does not have enough exercises for us to practice.” (S1); “The coursebook does not contain enough examples for writing structure.” (S2); “It does not have enough writing exercises for practice.” (S3); “There are not much writing practice to work on. If I want to practice writing more, I have to buy another writing book because the coursebook used by our Major does not provide many exercises.” (S9)

The next notable factor was the limited time allotted for writing class in one course (Item 26: $M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.496$). Having enough time to give and receive feedback on the writing of the students was one of the most important aspects of each writing class. It was the most fundamental step that could ignite students’ enthusiasm and writing skills. Each classroom in an ideal writing class should only have 8 to 10 students so that the teacher can reach out to and connect with students to their fullest potential. At NLU, however, the situation was exactly the opposite. The responses to the interviews, in which a lot of people complained about how little time was given to each writing session, were in line with the data gathered in the questionnaire.

“I think the time is not enough to practice writing skills, especially when there are too many

students in one class.” (S2); “I think the time is not enough to practice writing skills, especially when there are too many students in one class.” (S7); “The time allotted to each writing class is limited. The teacher cannot assess every piece of writings, considering there are so many students in one class.” (S10).

5. Discussion

In this part, the major findings from the data analysis were discussed to explain the meaning of the findings and why they were important, and these findings were related to those of similar studies.

5.1. The level of writing apprehension

Based on the information gathered from both the interviews and the survey, it can be concluded that the majority of English major students experienced writing anxiety. This psychological apprehension stemmed from a lack of vocabulary and understanding of sentence structures. The participants expressed their reluctance to engage in writing activities voluntarily due to their perceived lack of writing skills.

These findings align with previous research conducted by Cheng (2001), which identified common factors contributing to general writing apprehension. Difficulties in using English vocabulary, grammar structures, and other writing elements were reported as contributing factors. Qadir et al. (2021) also noted that apprehension arises from a genuine lack of proficiency and performance in the target language. The findings suggest that NLU students who constantly fear evaluation or lack the necessary English background for effective writing face challenges in the classroom. Dhanya & Alamelu (2019) similarly found that students' underlying fear of writing was attributed to inadequate writing skills and strategies. Notably, a significant number of students in this study acknowledged their lack of necessary writing abilities. Further supporting these findings, Sugumlu (2020) conducted additional research highlighting the influence

of students' proficiency levels and language proficiency on writing apprehension. The study also revealed that a majority of students (87%) experienced time pressure, which aligns with the findings of Wahyuni et al. (2017) and Kusumaningputri et al. (2018) regarding the impact of time pressure on writing anxiety. Moreover, students expressed concerns about their language abilities and evaluations from others, partially corroborating previous studies by Cheng (2001), Hyland (2003), Kirmizi (2015), Kusumaningputri (2018), and Quvanch & Na (2021).

Indeed, emotions can significantly influence students' writing abilities. It is possible that students at NLU feel overwhelmed by the belief that they should possess proficient writing skills, which may explain the findings. Additionally, inadequate preparation and lack of necessary writing skills could contribute to students' apprehension. In conclusion, this study successfully identified the writing anxiety experienced by students. Based on these findings, teachers can employ effective teaching methods to assist students in improving their writing skills.

5.2. Factors causing writing apprehension

The survey results confirmed the writer's speculations regarding the causes of students' fear of writing. All participants in the study acknowledged having low self-esteem, being critical of their teacher's methods, and being influenced by course-related factors. Among these factors, course-related factors had the highest mean score ($M = 3.87$), followed by teacher-related factors ($M = 3.74$) and student-related factors ($M = 3.60$).

A lack of grammar knowledge was identified as the primary factor contributing to writing apprehension. The majority of students (82%) believed that their grammar knowledge was insufficient to produce grammatically correct essays. This finding is in line with the findings of Hyland (2003), who emphasized the importance of extensive linguistic knowledge

and lexical choices in writing in an unfamiliar language. Students' struggles in expressing their ideas were identified as another factor impacting their self-esteem. Both the survey and interview participants highlighted the difficulty in developing and organizing their thoughts, as well as knowing how to begin or end a piece of writing. Zhang (2011) supported this finding, noting that student-related factors such as inadequate writing knowledge and personal fears, along with varying writing proficiency levels, contribute to these challenges. Jebrei et al. (2015) similarly identified competence levels and prerequisite writing skills as common student-related characteristics affecting writing anxiety. The study also found that students' anxiety about writing is primarily influenced by inadequate guidance from teachers and strict evaluation practices. The large class sizes prevent professors from providing thorough and individualized feedback that considers each student's writing proficiency level, leading students to disregard the importance of writing skills in their future endeavors. These findings align with the research conducted by Wahyuni et al. (2017), emphasizing the influence of teachers on students' writing anxiety through aspects such as lesson plans, instructions, and evaluations. Specific issues with the course book were identified as factors impacting students' writing abilities. The components of each unit, including content, templates, and time allocation, were found to contribute to students' anxiety. These findings are supported by Ekmekci (2018), who discussed how unexpected topics in textbooks can increase students' writing anxiety. Genc & Yayli (2019) also highlighted the impact of the course book on students' writing apprehension, further reinforcing the findings.

Overall, the research findings shed light on the various factors contributing to students' fear of writing, including grammar knowledge, difficulties in expressing ideas, teacher-related factors, student-related factors, and issues with the course book. Understanding these factors can inform effective strategies to alleviate writing anxiety among students.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

This study has investigated the factors that cause writing apprehension among NLU English majors. Firstly, it is evident that the students' level of writing apprehension is rather high. Most of the students have admitted that negative feelings about being asked to write, having their compositions evaluated, and receiving poor grades have affected their willingness to write. Furthermore, they tend to avoid most of the writing tasks in the classroom due to these feelings.

Secondly, the findings have revealed the factors that have a negative impact on students' writing apprehension. The first one is student-related factors that cause psychological issues within English majors. They have admitted that they have writing apprehension because of a lack of background knowledge, avoiding taking part in inside-class activities, not having good habits, and not being interested in teachers' writing styles. Moreover, they are familiar with expressing ideas in the Vietnamese language. The teacher-related factors are also considered one of the main reasons causing fear among English majors. Most of the students claim that teachers are active in giving feedback on their compositions. However, teachers do not have good writing teaching styles, such as not giving examples and explaining the lessons too fast. The last one is a course-related factor which includes students' coursebooks and time limitations in each writing class. Students agree that the coursebook does not have clear examples and meaningful exercises for students to practice. Besides, the time allotted for each writing task is limited.

The results offer various recommendations for NLU students and English teachers. Students

should participate in writing activities properly and actively. Students will take an interest in mastering writing skills as a result of developing good study habits. They must modify and adapt their attitudes in order to learn how to write in English. Additionally, it is important to practice this ability more often. For English teachers, it is imperative that their students completely comprehend the difficulties and anxieties associated with writing in order for them to adopt a positive outlook and effective study techniques. They should also encourage student involvement in the courses.

7. Limitations

Regarding the current investigation, several limitations need to be acknowledged. Firstly, it is important to note that the study only focused on a small percentage of the overall classes at NLU, with limited student participation. Consequently, the findings of this study may not be fully representative or entirely accurate.

Furthermore, another drawback of this study is the utilization of only two instruments: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, which limited the benefits of employing a mixed-methods approach. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of writing issues and students' expectations from writing lessons, it would have been preferable to incorporate pre-tests and post-tests. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, the researcher was unable to conduct these additional assessments. These limitations should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results of this study and should be addressed in future research endeavors to ensure a more robust and comprehensive investigation of the factors contributing to writing apprehension among NLU English majors.

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