

## THE CORRELATION BETWEEN STUDENTS' LEVEL OF ANXIETY AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN WRITING CLASS

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**Abstract:** *Writing is one of the language skills which shows how a second language learner performs his or her verbal competence. Writing performance of an English learner can reflect the learner's knowledge in English language patterns through the written discourse they present. However, due to several factors, writing in the target language is not always easy for a second language learner. Thus, there are some Indonesian students fail to perform their best in writing though those who can not achieve good mark in writing are not always the left behind students. Second language learner's verbal performance is determined by three internal factors namely filter, organizer, and monitor (Dulay, Burt, Krashen, 1982:45-60). The first factor is a subconscious process related to learner's affective state which includes anxiety. This research starts from a hypothesis that students' high level of anxiety is followed by lower students' achievement. Thus, this research is aimed to prove the hypothesis as well as seeing if there is a strong correlation between the students' level of anxiety and their achievement. The data were gained through document, questionnaire using Westide Test Anxiety Scale and Focus Group Discussion. The results of the study indicate a weak negative correlation between students' level of anxiety and students' achievement. From the result of the Focus Group Discussion, it was found that the sources of students' anxiety were varied.*

**Keywords :** *correlation, level of anxiety, achievement, writing class*

English is one of the world languages which is not widely used in Indonesia and mostly Indonesian students learn it as an additional language. Saville-Troike (2006:2-4) refers any additional language as a second language and a foreign language as a language which is not widely used in social context but learnt at school. Therefore, within a foreign language setting, Indonesian students learn English as an additional language or second language. Basically, English is taught as compulsory subject for junior and senior high school students although at present there have been a lot of schools at elementary level start to teach English to their students. At high schools, English is taught as an integrated language skills in which students learn the four main aspects of language skills : writing, reading, speaking, and listening integratedly. At university level, students, who

take English as their major, study the four language skills above as different subjects.

Among the four language skills above, writing is one of the language skills which shows how a second language learner performs his or her verbal competence. Writing performance of an English learner can reflect the learner's knowledge in English language patterns through the written discourse they present. However, due to several factors, writing, especially in any other language rather than the first language is not always easy for a second language learner. Thus, there are some Indonesian students fail to perform their best in writing though those who can not achieve good mark in writing are not always the left behind students.

How second language learners produce written verbal performance is influenced by three internal factors as suggested by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982:45-60) as filter, organizer, and monitor. Filter is a part of the internal processing system which subconsciously screens incoming language based on the affective factors. Organizer is another part of the internal processing system which is responsible for the learner's organization of the new language while monitor is responsible for the conscious linguistics processing. The following diagram shows how some internal and external factors influence learner's verbal performance.

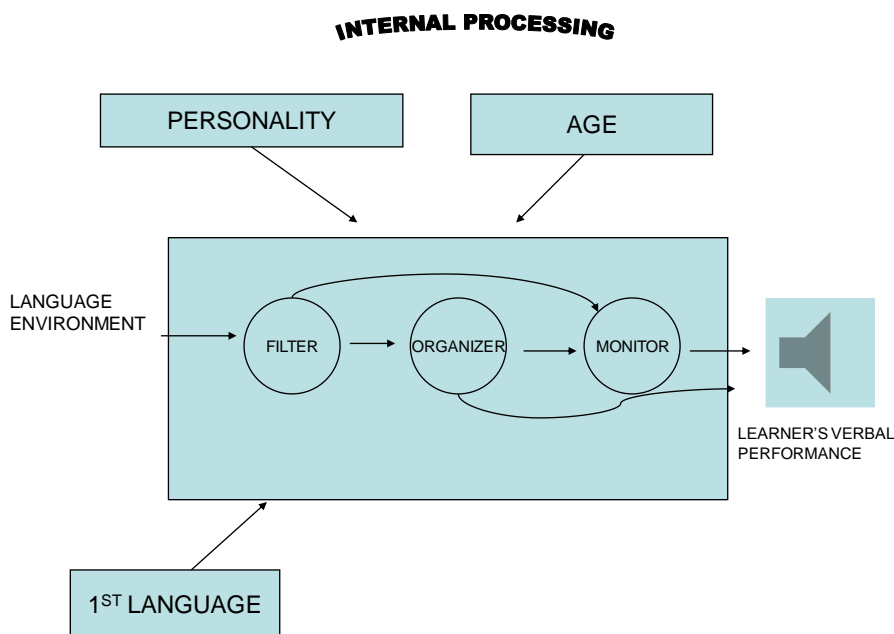


Diagram 1. Internal processing

This study focused on anxiety which is one of the aspects of affective factors within the filter. Krashen (1987:31) says "low anxiety appears to be conducive to second language acquisition". Based on this assumption, it is hypothesized that learners with low level of anxiety will achieve better than those who have high level of anxiety. Further this paper is going to present the results of

a correlative study between students' level of anxiety and students' achievement in writing class and some factors which arouse students' anxiety. In relation to anxiety, in this part the writer wants to explain about the effective filter.

The concept of Affective Filter was first proposed by Dulay and Burt (1977 as cited in Krashen ,1987:31). According to Stevick (1976, cited by Krashen, 1987:31) :

The Affective Filter Hypotheses captures the relationship between affective variables and the process of second language acquisition by positing that acquirers vary with respects to the strength or level of their Affective Filters. Those whose attitudes are not optimal for second language acquisition will not only tend to seek less input but they will also have high or strong affective filter- even if they understand the message, the input will not reach that part of the brain responsible for language acquisition, or the language acquisition device.

Students with optimal attitudes will tend to have low affective filter. The low affective filter will help learners achive second language acquisition. Effective language teacher are supposed to be able to provide input and make it comprehensible in a low anxiety situation (Krashen, 1987:32).

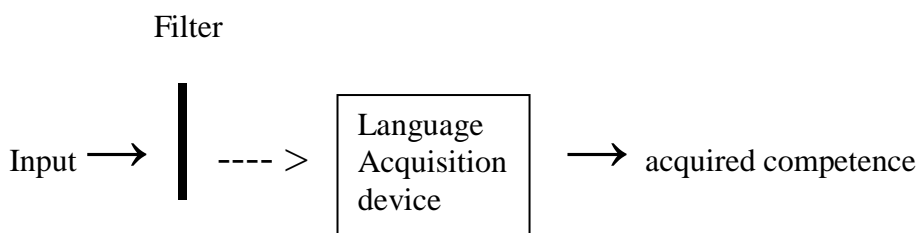


Figure 1. Operation of The Affective Filter

Meanwhile, students need to be free from stress or depressed situation so that they can focus on their lesson and assignment. Teachers are supposed to help students gain their self-confidence in their class, including in writing which becomes the main concern of this study. Dulay et al (1982:75) mention that two measurements of self-confidence are anxiety level and extroversion. Further, lower anxiety levels and a tendency to be out-going are connected with succesful L2 acquisition since students with high self-confidence are likely to put themselves in learning situation, they are not so worried about how they appear. According to Oxford (1999, cited in Brown, 2000:151) anxiety can be experienced at various level. Anxiety itself is defined as feelings of uneasiness, frustation, self-doubt, apprehension, or worry (Scovel, 1978:134 as cited in Brown, 2000:151

Ellis classifies anxiety as three kinds (1994:480) :

- a. Trait anxiety is recognized as a more permanent predisposition to be anxious. It can be said that it is viewed as an aspect of personality disorder.
- b. State anxiety is a kind of apprehension that is experienced at a particular moment as a response to a definite situation. This kind of anxiety is a combination of trait and situation-specific anxiety.
- c. Situation-specific anxiety is defined as anxiety which is aroused by a specific type of situation or event such as public speaking, exams, or class participation

The students' anxiety analyzed in this study is related with the last kind of anxiety, the situation-specific anxiety.

Some studies reveal that some sources of anxiety in language class are such as follows (Ellis, 1994: 450):

- learner's competitive natures

students tend to be anxious when they compare themselves with other learners in class and find themselves less proficient than others.

- tests and learners' perceived relationship with their teachers

examination often become nightmare for some students because mostly they have certain target of their mark. The way they view their teachers also affect their affective state. In fact, teacher's questions sometimes also threaten the students.

- communication apprehension

learners are afraid if they can not build a communication with others in the target language, they are worried if people do not understand what they are talking about.

- fear of losing self identity

It is related with the idea of 'culture shock', the learners are afraid of losing themselves in the target culture. It is one impact of affective state problems.

Mac Intyre and Gardner (1991 in Ellis, 1994:481) point out that anxiety can affect three stages of learning process : the input, processing, and output. Although results of studies on learners' anxiety are mixed, many of the previous studies are premised on the assumption that learners with low anxiety will learn better (Ellis, 1994:482).

Despite the various results of studies on learners' anxiety, two distinctions are made between *facilitating* and *debilitating* anxiety (Alpert and haber, 1960 in Ellis, 1994:481). The first kind of anxiety motivates learners to overcome their feeling of anxiety and drives them to make extra effort for the next assignment. On the other hand, the second kind of anxiety causes the learners to avoid the source of anxiety. Another expert, Oxford (1999 in Brown, 2000:151) calls those two kinds of anxiety as 'harmful' and 'helpful' anxiety. In other words, anxiety can bring both positive and negative effects.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research applied both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Creswell (2009:4) says that "Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem". This method is meant to dig and gain data from natural setting. While quantitative method is understood as a means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. Quantitative approach was applied to find the relationship between students' level of anxiety and their achievement while qualitative research was applied to reveal the factors which influence and arouse students' anxiety.

### **Problem Formulation**

This study was conducted to answer these following research questions :

1. Is there any correlation between students' level of anxiety and students' achievement ?
2. What are the factors that arouse students' anxiety ?

Based on the research questions above, the objectives of this research are to see if there is a strong correlation between students' level of anxiety and students' achievement and to find out factors which arouse students' anxiety.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were 53 students of English Department, in the Faculty of Letters, Soegijapranata Catholic University Semarang who took Academic Writing Class in 2011. Cohen and Manion (2007:101) mention that thirty can be considered as the minimum number of sample used in quantitative research. This study took 53 students of Academic Writing Class as the sample of this study.

### **Instruments**

To get the data, the writers used document, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Westside Anxiety Scale. The document used was the Writing students' marks. FGD was used to know the sources of students' anxiety. To know students' level of anxiety, the writers used Westside Anxiety Scale which is designed by Richard Driscoll, Ph.D from the American Test Anxiety Association. This scale is an instrument meant to identify students with anxiety impairments that comprises of ten items and takes five to eight minutes to administer. This instrument is found to be reliable and valid instrument.

**Procedure:**

1. The writers searched the data of students' mark from the document of the study program. Students' mark were converted into cardinal numbers : A = 4, B=3, C=2, D=1, E=0
2. The writers did a pilot study by distributing Westside Test Anxiety Scale which had been modified to 10 students
3. The validity of the questionnaire was analyzed using corrected item-total correlation
4. The writers distributed Westside Test Anxiety Scale to the participants of Writing Class.
5. The writers conducted focus group discussion (FGD) with some of the participants to get data about the sources of their anxiety in their Writing Class.
6. The data of students' achievement and results of Westside Test Anxiety Scale were first analyzed using descriptive statistics and the result was correlated using Pearson Product Moment to see if there was a correlation between Students' level of anxiety and their achievement.
7. The results of the data analysis and FGD were interpreted to answer the problem formulation.

**RESULTS**

To see and analyze the students' level of anxiety, the writer used the Westside Anxiety Scale which consisted of ten questions. Some of the questions in the questionnaire were modified to adjust with the nature of Writing class at the setting of this reserach. Since there are some modification in the questionnaire, the writer needed to do a piloting study . The piloting study which involved ten students was to see the reliability and validity of the questions in the questionnaire. The results of the piloting study indicated that all questions were valid and reliable. The reliability was measured by Alpha :

Alpha	Level of realibility
0,00 – 0,20	Not reliable enough
➤ 0, 20 – 0, 40	Slightly reliable
➤ 0,40 – 0, 60	Reliable enough

➤ 0,60 – 0,80	reliable
➤ 0,80 – 1, 00	Very reliable

Table 1. Level of reliability based on the Alpha Value (Triton, 2006, p.248)

The alpha value of the piloting study is 0,999 which means that the questionnaire is reliable. The value of Cronbach's alpha which is 0,99 is also higher than the r value for 10 respondents ( $df = 10-2$ ) which is 0,632 at 0,05 significant level using Person Product moment Correlation (Siegle, 2010). These results have shown that the questionnaire used is reliable. Below are the table of reliability statistics :

### Reliability Statistics

		N	%
Cases	Valid	10	45,5
	Excluded (a)	12	54,5
	Total	22	100,0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,990	10

Table 2. Result of reliability test with Alpha Cronbach

Meanwhile, using Corrected Item-Total Correlation, it is found that each item of the questionnaire is valid.

The r value for 10 respondents at 0,05 level of significance is 0,632. The table below shows that the r of corrected item total correlation of all items are above 0,632 which means that those items are all valid.

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
VAR00001	26,7000	40,233	,990	,988
VAR00002	26,5000	41,389	,854	,992
VAR00003	26,7000	40,233	,990	,988
VAR00004	26,7000	40,233	,990	,988
VAR00005	26,7000	40,233	,990	,988
VAR00006	26,5000	41,389	,854	,992
VAR00007	26,7000	40,233	,990	,988
VAR00008	26,5000	41,389	,854	,992

VAR00009	26,7000	40,233	,990	,988
VAR00010	26,7000	40,233	,990	,988

Table 3. Result of validity Test

### The Correlation between Writing Students' level of Anxiety and Students' Achievement

Before we see further the results of the data analysis, below is the standard of anxiety level based on Westside Anxiety Scale :

Scale	Level of anxiety
1,00 – 1,90	Low
2,00 – 2,50	Normal
2,50 – 2,90	High normal
3,00 – 3,40	Moderately high
3,50 – 3,90	High
4,00 – 5,00	Extremely high

Table 4. Westside Anxiety Scale

The result of descriptive statistics shows that the mean of anxiety level is 3,0962 (table 5). It indicates that the level of students' anxiety is moderately high. With standard deviation 0,51327 the level of students' anxiety is varied enough. Meanwhile, the mean of students' achievement (mark) is 2,4528. This number falls between 2 and 3 which can be represented by mark C. This result does not suggest a good result. Mark C can be interpreted as satisfactory. Further, the result of correlative analysis between students' level of anxiety and students' achievement is negative (table 6). The negative correlation suggests that higher level of anxiety tend to lead to lower achievement.

#### *Descriptive Statistics*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Mark	2,4528	,74849	53
Anxiety	3,0962	,51327	53

Table 5. Result of descriptive statistics



**Correlations<sup>a</sup>**

		VAR00001	VAR00002
VAR00001	Pearson Correlation	1	-,161
	Sig. (1-tailed)		,125
VAR00002	Pearson Correlation	-,161	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	,125	

a. Listwise N=53

Table 6. Result of correlation study

The correlation between students' level of anxiety and students' achievement is -0,161. It shows that the correlation between the two variables is very weak (Triton, 2006, p. 92).

r interval*)	Interpretation
0,00 – 0,200	A very weak correlation
➤ 0,201 – 0,400	Weak correlation
➤ 0,401 – 0,600	A strong enough correlation
➤ 0,601 – 0,800	Strong correlation
➤ 0,801 – 1,000	A very strong correlation

\*) for both positive and negative correlation

Table 7. Interpretation of r correlation analysis

From the result of data analysis above, it can be interpreted that there is a very weak correlation between students' level of anxiety and students' achievement. This means that students with high level of anxiety do not always get low marks. On the other hand, students with low level of anxiety may get low or bad marks.

The phenomena above may happen because some students have what is called facilitating anxiety (Ellis, 1994:481). Their anxiety drives them to perform better in the next assignments. These students are not always students who can be categorized as left behind students. Some of them are students with good academic track record. They are anxious because mostly they heard from their seniors that it is not easy to pass this subject or get good mark from this class.

However, there are also some other students who feel less anxious but they get low or bad marks. This may happen because they are not very serious in following the subject. Some possible reasons are because basically they are smart students but they feel ignorant to Writing subject. In fact, in writing class, students are expected to be very careful with writing system and students are also required to have good logic so that they can express their ideas in systematic paper. Another possible reason is due to student's personality. However, this study does not investigate further this issue.

In short, students' level of anxiety is not determined by students' daily academic performance or achievement. Moreover, there is a very weak correlation between writing students' level of anxiety and students' achievement.

### **Students' reasons to be anxious**

From the result of Focus Group Discussion, the writer got some reasons which became the sources of students' anxiety in writing class. Those reasons are as follows :

1. Students do not feel comfortable with the way teacher teaches
2. The atmosphere of the class is depressing
3. The students do not really understand the material given by the teachers, but they are afraid to ask
4. The students do not get enough feedback from the teacher
5. The students are not ready with their topics to write
6. The students do not have enough supporting theories
7. Stories from senior's experiences make the students feel pessimistic in the class

The reasons mentioned by students above mostly indicate situation-specific anxiety which is defined as anxiety which is aroused by a specific type of situation or event such as public speaking, exams, or class participation (Ellis, 1994:480) .

In relation to the sources of anxiety, it seems that most of the anxiety sources are students' project (assignment) and students' perceived relationship with their teachers. Some students have problems with their readiness to follow this subject. They have no topic to write nor strong theoretical background which is required to write an academic paper.

Some students do not feel comfortable with the way teacher teaches. In fact, some students admit that the class atmosphere is depressing. Students are always anxious if they fail or get bad mark in this subject but they do not know how to solve their problems. When they consulted their paper to their teachers, some students said that the teacher did not give enough explanation or show their mistakes. The teacher just claimed that the student's work was inappropriate or wrong. The students demand 'some extra explanation from their teachers' and it also seems that some students do not perceive reading as a part of their habits. Most students have often heard from their seniors that this subject is a tough subject. This perception has led students to feel depressed and have negative assumption about this subject. Further, this assumption can make students have anxious feeling. Regardless the fact that perhaps teacher does not give enough feedback during students' consultation, students also need to have positive view towards this subject.

### **CONCLUSION**

From the analysis presented above, there are some conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, there is a very weak correlation between writing students'

level of anxiety and students' achievement. It indicates that high level of anxiety does not always bring bad result. In fact, facilitating anxiety motivates students to learn and perform better in their assignments and examination. Second, some sources of students' anxiety are students' project (assignment) and students' perceived relationship with their teacher. Students' unreadiness to do their assignment becomes the source of their anxiety and this may also lead them to negative assumption about the subject and the teacher.

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