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Language Errors among Iranian EFL Students with High and Low Levels of Writing Anxiety

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Abstract: Writing is known as one of the major important language skills and it is the most difficult language skills for most EFL and ESL learners. In addition, anxiety is one of the factors that many language learners face with it in the writing process. This paper examines language errors among Iranian students of English with high and low levels of writing anxiety. For this purpose, 250 English language learners from universities of the south of Iran were participated in this research. This research used two tools to collect data: the Second Language Writing Anxiety Questionnaire (SLWAI), which was a pre-test containing 22 items and three subscales of physical anxiety, avoidance behavior, and cognition based on a Likert point scale. In addition, a language test in the form of essay writing was used to recognize their different categories and main errors in the writing performance. The results of this research showed that there is a negative relationship between students' anxiety and the number of errors in their writing performance. This study discusses the implications of this finding for English language learners and teachers.

Keywords: EFL writing performance, Error analysis, Language error, Writing anxiety, EFL learners

1. Introduction

Mastering a foreign or second language is a very difficult skill for most learners. In Iran, although the English language is prominent in schools and universities and has a high position in the national curriculum, due to some political and social factors, there is no stability in the use of the English language. Also, in Iran country where English is taught as a foreign language, EFL faces with problems in using and developing in the standard form of English. What is important is that English is introduced as a subject to pass in the examination (Khansir & Gholami Dashti, 2014). The lack of English input in the daily life of Iranian learners of English can be considered one of the main problems of learning English. Dehmardeh (2006) stated that even after seven years of studying English through the system of school, most Iranians learners have not got knowledge of English in order to communicate effectively in the language. according to him, there has not been a real attempt to make the curriculum of English relevant in Iran. The emphasis is on performance in exams, and yet these exams fail to test true communicative competence. However, writing has always a good place in learning English in EFL classrooms. Khansir & Hozhabri (2014) said that in Iran, English writing is always used in order to promote knowledge of English foreign language learners in learning language of English as a foreign language.

Reluctance to writing and false statements such as "writers are born not made" and "good writers are creative and inspiring" increase writing anxiety and hurt writing skills (Botes, Dewaele, & Greiff, 2020). Also, many English language students focus on one dimension of learning due to limitations of time, place, teaching materials, and tools. Most of the time, comprehension, memorization of vocabulary or grammar exercises, and speaking are emphasized, but teachers are reluctant to insist on writing and using language appropriately in a situational context. In addition, the teachers themselves are not confident in applying their methods and techniques in writing English. Therefore, investigating the language errors of EFL students with high and low writing anxiety is useful for finding specific language problems in English essay writing that EFL students of Bushehr University.

Let us start this paragraph about Error and contrastive approaches and their impact on English language teaching. Just, it is important is that teaching and learning English as second or foreign language learning and



teaching process is not essay and this process is a complex process. In other words, one of the good ways to learn English language as second or foreign language can be done through error analysis in EFL or ESL classes. Error and contrastive approaches have a major role in English in general and English writing in specific. Khansir (2012) mentioned that the errors of English learners have long been interested for English researchers. On the other hand, Contrastive and Error analysis, through the history of ELT have been important subjects of controversy syllabus designers, Reserchers, linguists, English teachers, and language experts over the world (Khansir and Pakdel, 2018). However, what is important for an English researcher or teacher is that Errors of writing can be an integral part of language teaching and learning in EFL or ESL classes in order to increase the knowldge of them to reach their purpose in teaching their students. Khansir (2013) stated that errors of writing of the Iranian students can guide the learners toward the development of communicative competence.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Writing was recognized as the most troublesome skill among the four English skills (Hengwichitkul, 2009; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013; Rattanadilok Na Phuket & Othman, 2015). Even a native speaker cannot do the writing part well (Kukurs, 2012).

Ariyanti (2016) stated that the writing course demands a lot from students to have successful learning and teaching of written products in the classroom. It seems that writing a thesis or essay is not so easy for university students.

So, this was a very difficult assignment for English language learners. It is also inevitable to discover the errors made by these learners because they have limited opportunities to write their sentences in English. They also practiced various writing activities such as note-taking, diaries, reports, and various projects. However Iranian learners of English have many problems in different fields of writing. One of these problems in writing is committing language errors that negatively affect the structure of sentences and the idea they want to convey to others. Research error analysis was coined by Steven Peet Corder and his colleagues in the 1960s and refers to a collection of methods for identifying, explaining, and describing student errors (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

Writing anxiety refers to emotional factors that stop or interrupt the writing process (Blasco, 2016). As an influential factor, writing anxiety causes anxiety and tension in students and makes them unable to write (Blasco, 2016; Katrancı. & Temel, 2018). Writing is very important for learning to happen. Without writing, language learning remains incomplete (Elizabeth, 2014).

Zafar (2016) stated that error analysis (EA) can be used as an effective tool in order to improve the writing ability of business students after a two-month remedial writing course. To examine the problem, some experts and practitioners in this field examined the types and frequency of learner errors that occur during the L2 learning process, the sources and reasons for these errors in the language of different learners are different from the first language. Therefore, this study investigated common language errors in English language students with high and low levels of writing anxiety.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Error Analysis

What is important for language researchers is that error analysis (EA) has been largely accepted as a topic of interest for them as a language subject in leraning second language. The sequences are error analysis (EA) explanations given by some experts. Dulay, Brett, and Krashen (1982) stated that error analysis is a method of examining the errors committed by English learners while learning the language. Moreover, it can not only help to show the strategies used by learners during language learning but also help teachers and other interested people to understand what problems learners face to improve their teaching. Corder (1974 cited in Mungungu, 2010) stated that there are two objectives for error analysis (EA). The first objective is a theoretical objective that shows how and what learners learn. The second goal is a practical goal that tries to show how to help learners learn the language by using the knowledge they already have. He also proposed a five-step process of error analysis, which consists of (1) error accumulation, (2) error detection, (3) error description, (4) error interpretation, and (5) error interpretation.



estimation of errors (Corder, 1974 cited in Wu & Garza, 2014). Corder (1974) (cited in Keshavarz, 2013) stated there are five steps in the research of error analysis in order to achieve those goals.

These stages are:

- Accumulation of sample of learners
- Recognition of errors
- Description of errors
- Interpretation of errors
- Estimation of errors

2.2 Sources of Errors

There are two sources of errors in L2 learning including intralingual and developmental errors and interlanguage errors (Brown, 2007). According to Penny (2001), interlingual transfer and intralingual transfer are important sources of errors in language. In addition, Heydari and Bagheri (2012) also expressed that interference produced by interlingual and intralingual transfer were the two origins of errors made by English learners. According to the research of Beheshti (2015), there are two main sources of errors have been made by the subjects such as inter-lingual (interfering) and intra-lingual (developmental). She added that the two group of Iranian students: upper-intermediate and advanced levels committed developmental errors while the third group of the Iranian learners: lower levels committed interference mother tongue (Persian language). Thus, her research showed that the most troublesome area was the preposition.

3. Writing Anxiety and related studies

Writing is a compound and difficult task even in the case that refers to first language because effective writing production requires several components including contents, organization, and language competence (Richards & Renandya, 2002; Khansir, 2012). Unquestionably, it becomes a more complicated and difficult task for Thai students who learn English as a foreign language because of the target language knowledge inefficiency of Thai students (Chuenchaichon, 2015; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013). Having inadequate grammatical knowledge of Thai students became one of the main problems that prevented them from being successful in English writing because they still produced many common errors in English grammar (Chuenchaichon, 2015).

Khansir (2021) argued that it is not surprising that writing is needed to be master in language. In communication, many people use writing as one of the language skills. However, writing is the one of essential skills of language and it is effective means of communication. It is the fact that writing is not easy task even for the native speaker of language and we know that the ability to write in English is not easy for foreign language learners. Khansir (2021) added that writing as an art of writer is needed a combination of experience and good instruction. Thus, writing is needed the scientific knowledge of the grammar of the language. A good knowledge of grammar is very useful for English students. Therefore, it's interesting to note the relationship between writing and grammar can be considered as a bridge in order to develop learner's knowledge of his/her language.

One of the main reasons for these writing errors is anxiety. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) stated that anxiety in a second language was "the perception of apprehension and tension especially connected to second language situation, comprising speaking, listening, and writing". According to Ellis (2008), anxiety is grouped into three kinds: Trait, state, and situation-specific anxiety. Trait anxiety is a larger perpetual arrangement to be worried about; it is a facet of personality. State anxiety is a fear experienced at a special period in time as an answer to a particular situation. Finally, situation-specific anxiety is related to apprehension at particular conditions and events.

Balta (2018) studied the connections among writing ability, writing anxiety, and metacognitive consciousness. The result of this study shows that students with low writing anxiety were more successful in writing argumentative texts in comparison to their partners with intermediated and high levels of anxiety.



Sundari & Febriyanti (2017) investigated Indonesian EFL Learners' Context to find the correlation between writing anxiety and writing skills. The results of the study showed that writing performance was good with a 72 average score; but, writing apprehension scores were 69.98 which showed that the students seemingly did not feel very anxious while writing the paper. They concluded that there was no important correlation between writing apprehension and writing performance for academic writing at a higher level of education.

Particularly, the feeling of fear or anxiety may cause an avoid attitude from doing the writing task (Yastibas & Yastibas, 2015). Yastibas & Yastibas, (2015) expressed that the matter of finding appropriate ideas to begin to write a particular type of essay, finding related information and theories to the topic to be written, combining and comparing between theories with the accurate structure of English is the state in a writing task that makes the students feel too anxious and afraid.

Salmani Nodoushan, (2018) attempted to classify common errors found in the writing performance of lower and upper-intermediate Iranian EFL learners. He investigated 3157 second-year EFL students of the lower and upper intermediate levels at different universities in Iran to provide an exact taxonomy of errors in EFL writing performance. After analyzing their paragraphs, their writing errors were classified into three main categories: structural, cognitive, and discursive.

Sattari (2012) investigated grammatical errors in compositions of Persian English learners and examination papers and revealed that a large number of errors produced by the learners at basic levels could be traced to the influence of their mother tongue. Barzegar (2013) performed an error analysis made by Iranian learners of English at intermediate levels and indicated that the majority of errors were developmental.

Purba, Tampubolon, Hutagalung, & Pandiangan (2022) investigated Errors in writing a short essay for the First Semester Students English Department at Nommensen University. Their study indicated that the students committed errors in the writing of their short essays, which are dominated by word structure errors or formation errors. They added that the students' errors occur due to interlingual and intralingual transfers or errors in the intended target language.

Karimnia & Abbasi (2011) examined a series of mostly presented grammatical errors of two senior and junior learners of undergraduate in various Iranian University settings. The series consisted of errors that occurred in direct-indirect levels of topics, tenses, quantifiers and intensifiers, articles, and words, using Persian structures, relative clauses, subject-verb agreement, and relative pronouns.

Alamri, Alanazi, & Alrashedi (2021) examined the role of anxiety in the writing of EFL university learners in Saudi Arabia. Their paper showed that the learners were usually anxious about paragraph structuring but sometimes experienced anxiety about constructing proper sentences with correct spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. Thus, unexpected resulting was female English foreign language of Saudi students were sometimes anxious about corrections, receiving feedback, and grading in writing tasks.

Nazemi & Najafi (2012) explored the most frequent error types among Iranian graduate students in English majors at different proficiency levels. The results showed ten types of most common error types among the three groups of proficiency, spelling, punctuation, article, verb formation, lexical choice, preposition, plurals, clause structure, verb tense and subject-verb agreement.

3.1 Research Questions

- 1 What types of language errors are often found in the writing performance of Iranian EFL university students with high writing anxiety?
- 2 What common types of language errors are frequently found in the writing performance of Iranian EFL university students with low writing anxiety?



4. Research Methodology

4.1 Sample

Thus, 250 students of English at Bushehr universities were participated in this research work. There were 120 males and 130 females, all of whom took the general English course. These participants were English language students in different fields who were selected from different universities in Bushehr. The participants in this research work were selected based on convenience sampling.

4.2 Research Instruments

This study utilizes two instruments for the collection of the data: The Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) had the role of a pre-test consisting of 22 items and three subscales that were somatic anxiety, avoidance behavior, and cognitive-based on point Likert scale to determine students with a high and low level of anxiety. In addition, a language test in the form of essay writing to recognize their different categories and main errors in the writing performance.

In this study, to choose the EFL university students with high levels of writing anxiety a pre-test is applied. This pre-test is the main instrument in this study and it is the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) developed by Cheng (2004). Cheng stated that "The multidimensional nature of the SLWAI makes it possible to investigate the relationships between different facets of L2 writing anxiety and aspects of writing performance and practices, using the three subscales".

4.3 Writing performance

This stage included the writing performance of EFL students with writing anxiety to measure the respondents' ability in language knowledge. Also, this study emphasized the recognition of common language mistakes of English language students in writing English at university. Therefore, common errors in English language students' sentences are reviewed. Therefore, a topic was stated as a post-test for students with writing anxiety and they were asked to write in English. In this way, the common errors in the anxiety writing performance of EFL students are determined according to the framework of the study.

4.4 Data Collection

The research article was conducted to investigate the linguistic errors of Iranian students of English with writing anxiety. For this purpose, 250 English language students participated in this study. To achieve the objectives of this study, the following procedures were adopted.

In this study, language errors in English language students with writing anxiety were emphasized, so the researcher visited English language students in different universities of Bushehr. Therefore, the researcher gave the EFL students similar topics to write about in the classroom. At the end of the class, he again assigned the same topics in story writing and asked the students to write about 150-200 words in 2 weeks. The following week, he gave the EFL students another topic on definition writing and again asked them to write over 2 weeks. This process continued during a semester that was about 15 weeks. The purpose of giving homework to EFL students during the semester was to increase their ability to think and recall words in writing.

Then the researcher carefully determined the writing errors of EFL students with high and low anxiety and recorded their errors.

4.5 Data Analysis

The writing task of EFL students was analyzed according to the type of language errors in English with high and low writing anxiety. After analyzing the students' writing, the researcher identifies the types of language errors that are often observed in the writing performance of Iranian English language students with high and low levels of writing anxiety.



According to [Gass et al \(2013\)](#), the method of analyzing the writing of the English language in the university in this study includes the first four stages of the following stages: Data collection, fault identification, fault classification, fault quantification, fault source analysis, and correction. Also, the classification of errors was done based on the classification of errors by [Keshavarz \(2012\)](#).

4.6 Findings and Discussion

In this study to find EFL students with high levels and low levels of writing anxiety, the researcher gave a Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) questionnaire to the EFL students.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistic of the Anxiety Level of EFL Students

Level	Number of Students	Minimum score	Maximum score	Percentage
Low Anxiety	75	45	53	30%
Moderate Anxiety	66	52	68	26.4
High Anxiety	109	67	87	43.6
	250	34	92	100

The number of respondents was 250 English language students in Bushehr universities. The results of the table showed that the number of students who had high writing anxiety is 109 with a percentage of 43.6% among English language students.

Also, this percentage among students with low and moderate anxiety was 30% and 26.4%, respectively. Therefore, according to the student's responses to the SLWAI questionnaire, a large number of students had a high level of writing anxiety, which was 109. To evaluate the essay writing of students with high writing anxiety, the researcher presented them with various topics in writing and after collecting the students' writings, he identified and underlined their errors. Then the researcher stated the different categories of errors along with their subcategories, which was done in this research based on the classification of errors by [Keshavarz \(2012\)](#).

Table 2. Main categories and sub-categories of errors in EFL students with writing anxiety

Main categories	Subcategories
1. Morph –syntactic errors	1) Errors in the use of articles
	2) Wrong use of Verb group
	3) Preposition errors
	5) Wrong use of verb groups
	6) Wrong use of tenses
	7) Omission of verbs
	8) Passive voice errors
	9) Subject-verb agreement
	10) Use of Persian construction
	11) Error in relative clauses and relative pronouns
	12) wrong word order
	2. Orthographic Error
2) Capitalization errors	
3. Lexico-Semantic Error	1) Wrong word choice



The above table shows three categories of writing errors and their subsets. This was the answer to Research Question 1: "What types of language errors are most often found in the writing performance of EFL students with writing anxiety?" This table includes form-syntax errors with 12 subcategories and spelling. Error with two subcategories and lexical-semantic errors, and error with one subcategory.

Answer to research question 2 "What types of common language errors are often found in the writing performance of Iranian EFL students with writing anxiety?"

Table 3. Category, type, and frequency of common errors in EFL students with high levels of writing anxiety

Error Type	Error Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1. Morpho-syntactic error:			
1) Errors in the use of articles	385	18.66	1
2) Wrong use of Verb Group	87	4.16	12
3) Preposition errors	312	15.12	2
4) plural morpheme error	89	4.31	11
5) Wrong use of tenses	136	6.59	6
6) Omission of verbs	76	3.68	
7) Passive voice errors	85	4.12	
8) Subject-verb agreement	97	4.70	10
9) Use of Persian construction	108	5.23	7
10) Error in relative clauses and relative pronouns	102	4.64	8
11) wrong word order	92	4.45	9
2) Orthographic Error			
1) Spelling errors	186	9.01	3
2) Capitalization errors	162	7.85	4
3) Lexico-Semantic Error			
1) Wrong word choice	146	7.07	5
	2063	100%	

Table 3 shows the total number of language errors in EFL students with high writing anxiety. These students made 2063 errors in their writing anxiety. The three most common errors were in the use of articles (18.66%), propositions (15.12%), and spelling (9.01%) errors.

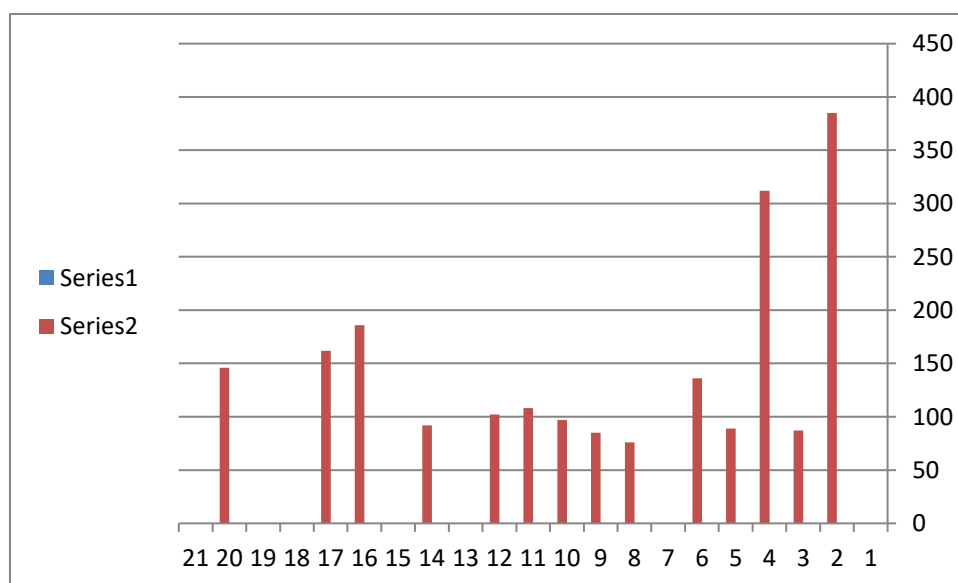


Figure 1. common errors in EFL students with high levels of writing anxiety

This figure showed the main category and sub-categories of errors in EFL students with a high level of writing anxiety.

This table showed that the total number of errors in morpho-syntactic in EFL with high writing anxiety was 1569, in orthographic error were 348, and in lexico-semantic were 146.

Table 4. Frequency and Rank Distribution of the three Categories of Errors in EFL with High Writing Anxiety

Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Morpho-syntactic	1569	76.5	1
Orthographic	348	16.68	2
Lexico-semantic	146	7.07	3

Table 5. Type and frequency of common errors in EFL with low-level writing anxiety

Error type	Error Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1. Morph-syntax error :			
1) Error in the use of articles	253	17.40	1
2) Wrong use of Verb Group	67	4.60	13
3) Preposition errors	86	4.67	12
4) plural morpheme error	89	6.12	7
5) Wrong use of tenses	124	8.52	4
6) Omission of verbs	76	5.22	9
7) Passive voice errors	54	3.71	14
8) Subject-verb agreement	71	4.88	11
9) Use of Persian construction	128	8.80	3
10) Error in relative clauses and relative pronouns	82	5.63	8
11) wrong word order	73	5.02	10
2) Orthographic Error			
1) Spelling errors	121	8.32	5
2) Capitalization errors	132	9.07	2
3) Lexico-Semantic Error			
1) Wrong word choice	98	6.74	6
	1454	100%	

Table 7 showed that English language errors with low anxiety levels in 14 subgroups made a total of 1454 language errors in writing. Three common errors in the use of articles ($f=253$, 17.40, $r=1$), capitalization errors ($f=132$, 9.07, $r=2$), and the use of Persian construction ($f=128$, 8.80, $r=3$). To answer research question 3, "Is there a difference in the number of errors between students with high or low writing anxiety?" The researcher has investigated the frequency, percentage, and rank of errors of English language students with high and low levels of writing anxiety.



The results of this study showed that there was a negative relationship between students' anxiety and the number of errors in their writing performance. So, when EFL students had higher levels of anxiety, there were greater errors in their writing. On the other hand, in students with lower anxiety, there were smaller errors in their writing. The outcomes confirmed the outcomes of Jugo, (2020), Arindra and Ardi (2020), Zhang *et al* (2023), Özkayran & Yilmaz (2020) and Asmari (2013) who, in various studies, reported negative relationships between EFL students' writing anxiety and their writing performance.

This was contradictory with Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daly's (2000) and Daly's (2012) studies which discovered with a higher level of anxiety students had better writing performance. Also, the outcomes are not consistent with Ghelichli (2022) who stated that there was no relationship between the grades of the students and their writing anxiety. This study consisted of the theories from Aydin & Zengin (2008), and Rasool *et al.* (2023) and Purba *et al.* (2022) that expressed the condition of high anxiety, and students' low writing performance.

5. Conclusion

In this study, examining the nature of errors enables researchers and foreign language teachers to have a better understanding of the language domain in writing where English language learners have the most difficulty. The data provided by the EFL learners' error analysis in this study will help teachers, test developers, and curriculum designers to make decisions about their teaching methods in the EFL language teaching and learning process. Also, understanding the problem area in writing enables teachers and instructors to eliminate situations that are likely to cause anxiety and worry for English language learners in writing performance. In addition, teachers can design the best techniques to use for more effective learning and choose the most appropriate teaching tools and textbooks to help their students overcome such writing problems.

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Author Contribution statement

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Conflict of interest

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