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EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF WRITING ANXIETY ON VIETNAMESE ESL UNDERGRADUATES' WRITING PERFORMANCE: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

In recent years, the impact of affective factors on second language acquisition, specifically the process of learning English as a second language or a foreign language, has garnered increasing attention from researchers. However, limited research has investigated the effects of affective factors, particularly the influence of anxiety on English writing, on the acquisition of English among Vietnamese students at the higher education level. This study aims to assess the levels of writing anxiety and writing performance among Vietnamese ESL undergraduate learners and explore the relationship between these variables. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a questionnaire for data collection. The participants consisted of 100 Vietnamese university students enrolled in a university in Ho Chi Minh City. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis. The results revealed that the participants experienced a high level of writing anxiety, and a significant negative correlation was found between writing anxiety and writing competence. The findings hold implications for teaching practices and provide a basis for future research in this area.

Keywords: *affective factors, ESL, writing anxiety, writing performance.*

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) has significantly developed and is now witnessing a rise in popularity, especially in Vietnam (Nguyen & Tran, 2018). However, the Vietnamese national curriculum in public schools restricts EFL teachers' ability to enhance students' writing skills. The use of multiple-choice tests in English exams has harmed students' writing abilities and their readiness for higher education, both locally and internationally. Traditionally, EFL teaching in Vietnam prioritizes linguistic aspects rather than writing. Although some schools allocate extra time for writing, the focus remains on producing written work evaluated based on linguistic knowledge and genre conventions.

Unfortunately, Vietnamese high schools neglect the significance of writing in English for students' future academic purposes. Writing for academic contexts poses challenges for Vietnamese students learning English as a foreign language due to the complexity of writing skills and the disparity between their native writing styles and English academic conventions. Additionally, university students in Vietnam are accustomed to multiple-choice test formats, emphasizing test-taking techniques and guessing instead of problem-solving and higher-order reasoning assessed through short-answer and essay tests during their high school time. This limited assessment approach hampers the evaluation of English language knowledge and skills when they continue in their higher education. Consequently, despite excelling in English standardized

tests, Vietnamese students often fear participating in productive skills such as speaking and writing, feeling inadequate in effectively expressing themselves in English.

1.2. Statement of the problem

In terms of academic tests, Vietnamese undergraduates taking the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) writing tests encounter various challenges. Firstly, the emphasis on the linguistic aspects of English language learning in Vietnamese pedagogy often leads to a neglect of writing skills. Consequently, students may lack the necessary preparation and practice to meet the rigorous demands of the IELTS writing tasks. Additionally, the differences between Vietnamese and English academic writing conventions pose a significant obstacle. Vietnamese students' first language (L1) writing styles, influenced by cultural and educational factors, may not align with the expectations and norms of English academic writing. This disparity can result in difficulties in organizing ideas, using appropriate vocabulary, and employing cohesive and coherent discourse structures. Furthermore, the time constraints imposed by the IELTS writing tests exacerbate the challenges for Vietnamese undergraduates. Limited time may hinder their ability to generate well-developed arguments and produce polished written responses. As a result, Vietnamese undergraduates often face considerable pressure and struggle to attain desirable scores in the IELTS writing component, impacting their prospects for further academic and professional opportunities.

The official annual report of the IELTS organization reveals that the mean score for the Vietnamese academic writing test was 5.63 out of 9.0 in 2016 and 5.7 out of 9.0 in 2019 (IELTS, n.d.). These consistently low scores reflect the current state of academic English writing instruction in Vietnam. Urgent action is required to address this issue efficiently and effectively. While it may not be possible to change the national educational system and the English education policies set by the Ministry of Education in Vietnam, teachers can play a crucial role in alleviating writing anxiety through research and practical application.

1.3. Aims of the research

The writing test is often regarded as the most difficult among the four skill tests due to the perception that writing is a complex skill, both in terms of learning and assessment. Additionally, it is recognized as a vital component of higher education (Uysal, 2009). Writing anxiety has been extensively investigated from the perspectives of both native and non-native speakers. Numerous studies have examined native speakers (Daly, 1977; Bloom, 1980; Faigley et al., 1981; Burgoon & Hale, 1983; Bannister, 1992) as well as second- and foreign language learners (Cheng et al., 1999; Al-Ahmad, 2003; Cheng, 2004; Daud et al., 2005; Latif, 2007; Salem, 2007; Erkan & Saban, 2010; Ismail et al., 2010). However, limited research has been conducted on writing anxiety among Vietnamese students in their university life. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate the levels of ESL writing anxiety among Vietnamese undergraduates taking the IELTS academic exam and examine its association with their actual writing performance (IELTS writing scores).

The motivation for this research stems from the researcher's teaching experience in Vietnam since 2014. In this context, students were required to study English from elementary to tertiary level, driven by a strong desire to improve their English communication ability. However, the researcher has observed students' reluctance to engage in writing activities and negative emotions towards writing tests. Students express insecurity and nervousness when attempting to write even a single sentence in English. Limited exposure to written English and the perception of a gap in proficiency between themselves and native English speakers contribute to their lack of self-confidence. Furthermore, students view English writing as irrelevant due to the dominance of multiple-choice exams in Vietnam, which solely focus on test preparation rather than communication skills.

Despite these challenges, Vietnamese students increasingly prefer English-taught programs at domestic or overseas universities, highlighting the importance of developing diverse writing skills in an academic environment. However, teaching writing skills is often overlooked, leading to high writing anxiety among students. Consequently, this study aims to address the gap in research by examining writing anxiety, perceived writing competence, and their relationship with IELTS writing scores among Vietnamese ESL learners.

In conclusion, while second language writing anxiety has garnered attention from researchers and educators worldwide, limited studies have focused on the context of writing anxiety among Vietnamese high school students, especially those preparing for the IELTS academic exam. Thus, this study aims to fulfil this research need by measuring Vietnamese ESL learners' writing anxiety, perceived writing competence, and their relationship with learners' IELTS writing scores.

1.4. Significance of the research

McLeod (1987) asserted that writing involves both emotional and cognitive processes. Consequently, affective factors commonly influence individuals' writing performance. Vietnamese ESL students' weaknesses in writing can be attributed to their lack of motivation to write, insufficient writing skills, and the inherent difficulty of writing tasks. Despite the growing recognition of second language writing anxiety (SLWA) by international researchers and educators (Jebreil et al., 2015), there is a dearth of studies examining SLWA among Vietnamese students in general and Vietnamese undergraduates in particular.

This study highlighted the significance of investigating Vietnamese learners' anxiety regarding their English writing competence. It proudly positions itself as the pioneering investigation into the influence of SLWA on the IELTS writing performance of mainly Vietnamese university students who require support in mitigating anxiety during their academic writing tests in the Vietnamese context. The study's findings can potentially inform English language centres, local universities, curriculum developers, policy-makers and IELTS trainers, enabling them to adapt and enhance their approaches to training candidates in this demanding skill.

1.5. Research Questions

As mentioned above, the primary objective of this study is to deepen understanding of the role of anxiety in English writing among Vietnamese undergraduate students. Published studies focusing on these crucial affective variables about writing competence within the Vietnamese context are limited. Research on writing anxiety and its impacts in Vietnam is comparatively scarce compared to Western and Arabic countries. According to Horwitz (2001), the relationship between language anxiety and language performance in ESL learners "remains relatively unexplored," particularly in Vietnamese contexts. Therefore, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

What are the levels of English language writing anxiety among Vietnamese university students?

What is the relationship between writing anxiety and the writing performance of Vietnamese university students?

2. Literature Review and Methods

2.1. Literature review

Second language writing anxiety (SLWA) is the tendency to avoid writing and situations that require writing, coupled with the potential for evaluation (Hassan, 2001). Research on ESL writing has consistently demonstrated the significant impact of ESL writing anxiety on writing performance (Hassan, 2001; Horwitz, 2001; Cheng, 2004). Students with high levels of writing anxiety tend to produce shorter compositions and demonstrate less confidence in their work than their less anxious peers (Hassan, 2001). Cheng (2002) also

investigated factors associated with SLWA and subsequently developed the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) in 2004 to assess the levels and types of SLWA (Cheng, 2004). This chapter provides an extensive literature review on the broader concept of foreign language learning anxiety, English language writing anxiety and writing competence.

2.1.1. English language writing anxiety

Writing skill is widely recognised as the most challenging among the four language skills (Kurt & Atay, 2007). Writing encompasses various aspects such as language proficiency, idea transfer, interpersonal communication, and context appropriateness (Hayes & Flower, 1987). It is a complex productive activity that necessitates brainstorming, data gathering, organisation, and integration of thoughts while maintaining a solid grasp of the second language (L2) (Basturkmen & Lewis, 2002). Effective writing requires clear articulation, meeting the target audience's expectations, organising thoughts coherently, and finding enjoyment in writing in L2. However, L2 learners often struggle with these tasks, leading to increased self-esteem and difficulties in coping with writing (Basturkmen & Lewis, 2002).

Writing for academic purposes demands high-level cognitive processes, including content comprehension, logical organisation, and grammatical accuracy, which depend on strong critical thinking skills. Unfortunately, the current Vietnamese high school context does not adequately train these skills, leading to a sense of apprehension among students (Daly & Miller, 1975a). Writing apprehension refers to avoiding the writing process, mainly when it involves evaluation, and encompasses a complex interplay of attitudes, emotions, and behaviours (Daly & Miller, 1975a). Students with writing apprehension are often intimidated by the expectation to demonstrate their writing competence and fear the evaluation process, resulting in avoidance and destructive behaviours (Holladay, 1981).

Writing anxiety, another term used to describe writing apprehension has been found to impact the quality of written work negatively and actual writing behaviour (Burgoon & Hale, 1983). Writing anxiety tends to increase when an apprehensive writer faces time pressure (Kean et al., 1987). Focusing excessively on the grammatical form has been associated with higher levels of writing apprehension while focusing on content has been linked to lower levels (Taylor, 1989). However, some researchers argue that anxiety can function both as a warning and a motivation for students, leading them to avoid or actively engage in the learning task (Scovel, 1978). Considering students' anxiety levels before assigning writing tasks is highly recommended for teachers.

Numerous studies have explored writing anxiety in foreign language learners. Daly and Miller (1975b) found a correlation between higher levels of apprehension and stress and lower-quality written products among undergraduate students. Daud et.al (2005) discovered that low-performing students had higher anxiety levels in writing due to limited language proficiency and experience. Latif (2007) identified English composition as an anxiety-provoking factor, with low self-efficacy contributing to increased writing apprehension. Negari and Rezaabadi (2012) revealed that students felt less nervous when their work was not going to be evaluated, and higher anxiety correlated with better writing performance. Aljafen (2013) found moderate writing anxiety levels among Saudi EFL students, with engineering students exhibiting higher anxiety than preparatory year and pharmacy students. Wahyuni et.al (2019) observed moderate levels of writing anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners, with no significant relationship between anxiety levels and academic levels. Quvanch and Kew (2022) found a moderate level of writing anxiety among Afghan EFL students, with variations based on English proficiency levels.

In the Vietnamese context, Nguyen and Tran (2018) surveyed 120 English-major students at a university in Ho Chi Minh City. They found that they experienced a moderate level of writing anxiety, mainly caused by linguistic difficulties, lack of ideas, fear of negative evaluation, and time pressure. The students

also reported using various strategies to deal with writing anxiety, such as planning, revising, seeking feedback, and relaxing. Khau (2019) discovered that most sophomores majoring in Englishh in Tra Vinh University experienced moderate anxiety levels during writing classes.

In conclusion, this literature review has discussed the relationship between English writing anxiety and various aspects of writing among EFL learners, based on many quantitative studies that used different instruments and methods to measure these constructs. The review has shown that most studies found a negative correlation between writing anxiety and some aspects of writing, such as performance, achievement, quality, self-efficacy, or strategy use, meaning that higher anxiety levels were associated with lower outcomes on these aspects. These studies suggest that English writing anxiety is a common and serious issue for Vietnamese students who learn English as a foreign language. Therefore, more research is needed to explore the causes and consequences of writing anxiety in different contexts and populations and the possible interventions to help students cope with it. Moreover, teachers should be aware of the signs and symptoms of writing anxiety among their students and provide them with appropriate guidance and support to improve their writing skills and confidence.

2.1.2. The IELTS test

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is a widely recognised and utilised examination for assessing English language proficiency. It is crucial in various contexts, such as higher education admissions, immigration requirements, and employment opportunities. This literature review aims to provide an overview of research conducted on the IELTS test and specifically focuses on the IELTS Writing component. The IELTS test comprises four modules: Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking. It assesses various language skills, including vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, and communication. Researchers have explored the reliability and validity of the IELTS test, emphasising its effectiveness as a measure of language proficiency (Elder & McNamara, 2006; Weir, 2005).

The IELTS Writing component evaluates test takers' ability to produce coherent, well-structured written responses. It consists of two tasks: Task 1 requires candidates to interpret and describe visual data, while Task 2 involves writing an essay on a given topic. Several studies have investigated different aspects of the IELTS Writing assessment, focusing on task performance, scoring criteria, and rating reliability.

Researchers have examined the characteristics and performance of candidates in IELTS Writing tasks. Studies have explored the strategies employed by test takers in approaching Task 1 and Task 2, including data interpretation, organisation, and lexical choices (Cheng, 2013; Raimes, 1985). Additionally, investigations have been conducted to understand the challenges candidates face in meeting task requirements and managing time effectively (Fulcher, 2003; Weigle, 2002).

Numerous factors have been identified as influencing IELTS Writing performance. These include language proficiency levels (Chapelle et al., 2008), test-taker characteristics (Brown & Taylor, 2005), cultural and educational backgrounds (Yan, 2009), and test preparation practices (Weir, 2005). Research has also examined the relationship between IELTS scores and academic success or English language learning outcomes (Chapelle, 2001; Davison, 2004).

2.1.3. Writing Performance

Writing performance is a crucial skill that plays a significant role in academic, professional, and personal contexts. This literature review aims to provide an overview of the research conducted on writing performance, including factors influencing writing proficiency, assessment methods, and instructional approaches to enhance writing skills.

Numerous factors have been identified as influencing writing performance. Studies have explored the impact of linguistic factors such as vocabulary knowledge (Read, 2000), grammatical accuracy (Ferris, 2002), and sentence complexity (Ortega, 2003). Cognitive factors including working memory capacity (Kellogg, 1996) and metacognitive strategies (Flower & Hayes, 1981) have also been investigated. Other factors, such as motivation (Dörnyei, 2005), self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000), and cultural influences (Kubota, 2012), have also been examined.

Researchers have explored various assessment methods for evaluating writing performance. Traditional approaches include holistic scoring, analytic scoring, and rubrics (Weigle, 2002). Studies have investigated the reliability and validity of these assessment methods (Jacobs et al., 1981), as well as explored the use of automated scoring systems (Attali & Burstein, 2006) and text analysis tools (Crossley et al., 2016) to assess writing proficiency. Additionally, research has examined the impact of assessment criteria and rater bias on scoring outcomes (Weigle, 2010).

Various instructional approaches have been examined to improve writing performance. Process-based approaches emphasise the writing process, including pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Research has investigated the effectiveness of peer feedback (Cho & MacArthur, 2010), teacher feedback (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014), and collaborative writing tasks (Storch, 2005) in enhancing writing skills. Genre-based approaches have also been explored, focusing on specific writing genres and their conventions (Swales, 1990). Furthermore, studies have examined integrating technology, such as online writing platforms and computer-assisted instruction, in writing instruction (Warschauer & Grimes, 2008).

Writing performance in specific disciplines and professional contexts has received attention in the literature. Researchers have examined writing demands and expectations in academic disciplines, such as science (Hillocks, 1986) and humanities (Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006). Studies have also explored writing proficiency in professional domains, including business (Zamel, 2004) and healthcare (Kuznetsova et al., 2018). The investigation of discipline-specific writing genres, conventions, and discourse communities has been a research focus.

2.2. Methods

As previously discussed, this study is designed to examine the relationship between anxiety in writing with writing competence among Vietnamese university students who intend to use English writing in their academic programs. The main objective of this study is to determine the levels of anxiety and competence that the students experience while writing in English as a foreign language.

2.2.1. Research design

A suitable tool was needed to achieve the explicit goals and assess the students' affection toward writing in English. As a result, the study design is quantitative since the instrument adopted to answer the raised research questions could help to cover a considerable number of people, which is more than the qualitative study could do. Hopkins (2000) stated that quantitative research is a way to find the correlation between variables (e.g., performance, time, etc.) using statistics.

2.2.2. Data collection

The researcher developed a questionnaire by adapting the two instruments in this research. Firstly, the Daly–Miller Writing Apprehension Test (WAT; Daly & Miller, 1975) was used as an instrument for Second Language Writing Anxiety. Secondly, the Writing Anxiety Scale from a study conducted by Tsao, Tseng and Wang (2017) was adapted to measure four specific types of writing anxiety: fear of writing tests, confidence, negative evaluation and making mistakes in writing compositions. Also, some items from this scale were selected to measure the perceived writing competence and writing attitude. The reason for

adapting was that Cheng (2004) declared that even though, on the whole, the Daly-Miller WAT had been proven to be an instrument of satisfactory internal consistency reliability with concurrent and predictive validity, it needed adapting to be used to study second-language writing. The final version of this questionnaire was translated into the Vietnamese language so that Vietnamese respondents could fully understand the questions without any ambiguity and confusion.

The questionnaire was conducted using a Likert-type response format consisting of a 5-choice response scale corresponding to 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (uncertain), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). Besides, the respondents' latest IELTS writing scores were collected to gauge English writing performance. The questionnaires were developed carefully to assure accuracy and validity. After officially receiving permission from the university to collect the data, the researchers began the process by distributing the questionnaire copies to the selected students. The researchers administered the data surveys on their own.

Finally, each student's data was manually entered into the Microsoft Excel file that was then transferred into the Microsoft SPSS computer program. Besides, at the end of the questionnaire, the latest IELTS writing score was reported by each individual and was also keyed in inside the same Excel file.

2.2.3. Sampling

To conduct this research, the researcher contacted a local university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam for support. The examination scope of this research is aimed at Vietnamese undergraduate students who have taken IELTS exams (Academic module) before. According to the staff in charge where the present study was executed, the official number of the population was 220 students who have taken the IELTS exam. The researchers then shortlisted the number of targeted students eligible for this research by setting different requirements: Vietnamese nationality, the age group from 19 to 22, both males and females, having taken the IELTS exam before and getting official Writing skill scores in the Academic module. Of the total 220 students with IELTS scores recorded, the researchers found 100 students that met all the requirements. The selected participants then were fully aware that their personal information supplied to the researcher would be maintained strictly confidential and eradicated after the study was completed.

In the next step, the researcher, in person, distributed the questionnaires surveying writing anxiety and writing performance to these 100 participants. With support from this university staff, the total respondents' return rate was 100%. Of the 100 returned questionnaires, 100% were valid for data analysis. Among the respondents (N= 100) were 67 males and 33 females. The students' IELTS writing scores in this present study ranged widely from 2.5 to 7.5 (as 9.0 is the maximum score).

2.2.4. Analysis plan

Upon implementing the Affective Factor scale draft, the researcher randomly invited 30 students in the language centre to do the survey in March 2023. All the returned questionnaires were carefully checked and valid for data input and pilot test.

What is next? The researcher used SPSS version 25.0 to carry out a pilot - test for the reliability of this adapted questionnaire after collecting the first ten responses. Reliability relates to the consistency of a measure. Therefore, Cronbach's α is the most extensively used test to determine the internal consistency of an instrument. The Cronbach's α result is a number between 0 and 1. The coefficient between 0.7 and 0.98 reflects high reliability. After computing item analysis by SPSS, the pilot test results for each variable in the instrument ranged from 0.718 to 0.892, which were entirely satisfactory.

After the pilot test, a formal test was conducted. The coefficients ranging from .80 to .92 are pretty satisfactory.

Analyzing the data in this pure quantitative study means that the survey items were analysed, synthesized and, the IELTS writing test scores were tallied, and then the data were keyed into Microsoft Excel and exported to SPSS. According to the research questions, the researcher used Statistic Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 25.0 to help analyse the data. Initially, the researcher performed descriptive statistics to understand each variable's characteristic in this study. Descriptive statistical analysis has been used to illustrate each research variable's means and standard deviation. In this study, the mean (arithmetic mean) adds up all the scores and is divided by the number of scores in the distribution. The standard deviation approximates the average amount by which each score differs from the group's mean score.

The means and the standard deviations of each item would be the participants' frequencies of four types of writing anxiety; a higher mean indicates the participants' higher agreement on a variable. In addition, inferential statistics were also employed for the analysis, including correlation analysis. In detail, correlation analysis (specifically, the Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient) was employed to examine the correlation between the affective factors and the writing scores.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

This chapter presents the findings from the questionnaires, and then the discussion about results is also stated.

Research question 1. What are the levels of Vietnamese undergraduate students' English language writing anxiety?

Descriptive statistics for the four variables of Writing Anxiety are illustrated in Table 1

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the four variables of Writing Anxiety

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Fear of negative evaluations	100	4.013	.75463
Lack of confidence	100	4.189	.69935
Fear of making mistakes	100	4.056	.75887
Fear of writing tests	100	4.023	.72148

As seen from the table above, the respondents showed a high level of anxiety. With an average mean score of 4.013, the respondents in this study tended to have a fear of negative evaluation of their English compositions. Then, the respondents in this study were inclined to lack the self - confidence when writing their English compositions, with the average mean score of 4.189. Besides, the respondents showed a significantly high level of anxiety for fear of making mistakes in writing, with the overall mean score for this variable being approximately 4.056. Finally, the average mean score of 4.023 indicated that the respondents in this study had a marked fear of making mistakes when writing in English.

Research Question 2: What are the relationships between writing anxiety and actual writing performance?

The bivariate Pearson product-moment correlation was utilised in this study to examine the correlations among the five independent variables themselves and with one dependent variable. This method produces a sample correlation coefficient, *r,* which measures the strength and direction of linear relationships between pairs of continuous variables. The correlations between four types of writing anxiety and writing performance were numerically depicted in the table below:

What are the relationships of performance (i.e., the IELTS writing scores of the respondents in this study) with writing anxiety and perceived writing competence?

Table 2. Correlations among four types of Anxiety and IELTS Writing Scores.

Variables	Actual Writing Performance
NE	-.624[**]
LC	-.453[**]
FWM	-.568[**]
FWT	-.548[**]

*Note. N = 100, ** = p<.01*

FNE: Fear of Negative Evaluations

LC: Lack of Confidence

FWM: Fear of Writing Tests

FWT: Fear of Writing Mistakes

As illustrated in the table, the bivariate correlations showed that all four variables were significantly related to the learners' IELTS writing scores. The negative values of *r* of all four types of writing anxiety indicated a negative correlation between anxiety in writing and the IELTS writing scores among participants. In detail, the variable of Fear of Negative Evaluation had a strong correlation with writing outcomes in IELTS (*r*= -.624, p<.01). Nonetheless, three variables: Fear of Writing Tests (*r*= -.548, p<.01), Fear of Making Mistakes (*r*= -.568, p<.01) and Lack of Confidence (*r*=.-453, p<.001) had a moderate correlation with writing outcomes in IELTS. In other words, the higher levels of anxiety the writers experienced, the lower their scores exhibited

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. The levels of English writing anxiety

Research question 1 examined the levels of the target affective variables among Vietnamese undergraduate students. The descriptive analyses highlighted that the students experienced high writing anxiety. In detail, students tended to fear negative evaluation of their English writing compositions, fail to have self-confidence when writing their English compositions, fear making mistakes and fear taking writing tests using the English language. These results from this study are in line with a wealth of studies by Salem (2007), Huwari and Aziz (2011); Al-Ahmad (2003), Waston (2007), and Erkan and Saban (2011) Rezaei, M. & Jafari, M. (2014) and Jebreil, Azizifar, Gowhary & Jamalinesari (2015). These studies indicated that the participants experienced high levels of writing apprehension. However, these results run counter to

Aljafen's (2000), Nguyen and Tran (2018), Wahyuni, Oktavia, and Marlina's (2019), Khau's (2019), Quvanch and Kew's (2022) studies whose results confirmed empirically a moderate level of writing anxiety among the target students. Meanwhile, a study by Jerryk (2016) showed the opposite result, meaning the participants exhibited low writing anxiety levels.

3.2.2. Correlations between writing anxiety and writing performance.

In this particular study, the writing performance of the students was measured by their actual scores on the IELTS writing test. The findings of this study confirmed a negative correlation between writing anxiety and practical IELTS writing scores among Vietnamese participants. In simpler terms, Vietnamese students who experienced high levels of writing apprehension tended to perceive themselves as less competent and performed significantly worse on the writing test than their counterparts with low levels of writing apprehension.

In reality, these outcomes align with several previous studies (Daly, 1978; Daly & Miller, 1975a, 1975b; Daly & Wilson, 1983; Daily, 1985; Daly et al., 1981; Pajares & Johnson, 1993; Kim, 2006; Erkan & Saban, 2011; Ni'mah et al., 2017) that have explored the relationship between writing anxiety and actual writing performance. This study used the IELTS writing scores, a widely recognised standardized test, to assess the student's writing abilities. The results of the correlation between anxiety and performance in this study support Daly's research (1985), which also found that students with high levels of writing apprehension scored lower on standardised tests. The findings of Erkan and Saban (2011) also align with this study, as they demonstrated that individuals with low levels of writing apprehension performed significantly better on writing skills test than those with high levels of writing apprehension. Similarly, Ni'mah et al. (2017) conducted a study on Malaysian students and found a significant negative correlation between writing apprehension and writing performance.

Interestingly, a study by Lee and Krashen (1997) yielded similar results in the context of writing in the first language. Their study revealed that even native Chinese speakers in Taiwan with higher levels of writing apprehension tended to receive lower scores on their compositions written in their mother tongue.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusion

In the context of Vietnamese pedagogy, the focus of EFL teaching has traditionally been on the linguistic aspects of the target language. Consequently, there has been a significant emphasis on exam-oriented teaching methods, which fail to foster critical thinking or problem-solving skills among learners. The prevalent use of multiple-choice tests has led Vietnamese teachers to prioritise tips and techniques for guessing answers, leading to rote learning and cramming and encouraging test-wise learners. Consequently, Vietnamese undergraduate students are denied the opportunity to develop and be assessed in productive skills such as writing and speaking. Instead, they are constantly prepared to achieve high scores on tests and pass exams rather than acquiring practical skills and applying their knowledge. As a result, when these students take courses like IELTS to prepare for future exams that assess productive skills, they often experience significantly high levels of anxiety. The findings of our study indicate a negative correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance. These results highlight the importance of nurturing the affective dimensions of EFL learning. EFL practitioners should, therefore, explore students' beliefs about their writing abilities and their apprehension towards writing. Our findings suggest that these factors are crucial predictors of academic writing performance among Vietnamese EFL students. As Ernest Hilgard stated, "Purely cognitive theories of learning will be rejected unless a role is assigned to affectivity" (1963,

p.267, cited in Brown, 2014). Therefore, in addition to supporting students with writing apprehension and attitude, Vietnamese teachers should try to help students understand how their emotional processes can influence their EFL writing performance.

4.2. Limitations of the study

Limitations of the current study include its exclusive focus on anxiety as one aspect of affective factors. While the researchers observed a consistent relationship between anxiety and writing competence, other affective variables such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, inhibition, personality types, or motivation may also have similar relationships. Future research that examines the same components in different contexts or with different age groups may yield different results. Another limitation is the scarcity of studies examining writing anxiety in the Vietnamese context, despite extensive research on this topic worldwide in both first and second-language contexts. Therefore, this study has a limited research base to draw upon when discussing academic writing anxiety among Vietnamese university students. Furthermore, the results of this study may not apply to other.

Asian countries, thereby reducing opportunities for the dissemination of this research globally. Additionally, this research focuses exclusively on undergraduate students preparing for the IELTS exam. Consequently, the results may not generalise to elementary, high school students or graduate students. Lastly, studying only one university limits the generalizability of the findings to the numerous other Vietnamese universities across the country. Another limitation is that the research instrument solely consisted of a questionnaire survey. Lastly, the total number of respondents in this study was relatively small (100), which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future studies in the same vein should include a larger sample size.

4.3. Suggestions for further studies

Suggestions for further studies include adopting a qualitative or mixed-method research design to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Vietnamese high school students. Researchers are encouraged to investigate other affective factors, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, inhibition, personality types, or motivation, among the same target population or other research subjects in the Vietnamese context. Specifically, exploring students' writing motivation, including achievement, intrinsic, and extrinsic motivation, as Kellogg (1994) suggested, would be beneficial. Furthermore, future research should encompass a broader range of student populations, including elementary, high school or post-graduate students, to obtain a comprehensive picture of writing anxiety across all levels of Vietnamese education. It is recommended to supplement the survey instrument used in this study with personal interviews and pre- and post-writing samples to offer a more effective and accurate assessment of participants' feelings. Additionally, future researchers should consider employing different instruments or additional measures to validate the results and enable broader generalisations. Due to this study's limited sample size and geographical location, future research should aim to recruit a larger and more diverse sample from various regions of Vietnam, both urban and rural areas. Finally, it is suggested that future studies explore other types of academic standardised tests, such as TOEFL iBT, Cambridge CAE Advanced, or PTE Academic, popular among students preparing for academic life, as an alternative measure of writing performance.

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