

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

A STUDY OF WRITING - RELATED
ANXIETY IN MALAYSIAN
DIPLOMA ENGINEERING
STUDENTS: A FOCUS ON
COGNITIVE, SOMATIC, AND
AVOIDANCE BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

Developing English language competence is crucial for university students to achieve academic success, as it underpins effective communication and participation in academic activities. However, the path to writing proficiency presents significant challenges, particularly for non-native speakers like Malaysian diploma engineering students. This thesis investigates the complex difficulties encountered by this group in academic writing, focusing on the barriers they face and the writing anxiety that exacerbates these challenges. The study examines various educational dimensions, identifying linguistic barriers, psychological factors, and teaching methods that contribute to writing anxiety. It explores how cognitive, somatic, and avoidance behaviours manifest as negative thought patterns, physical symptoms like nervousness, and procrastination in response to writing tasks. By providing a comprehensive understanding of these factors, the research highlights the complex interaction between linguistic challenges, teaching practices, and individual cognitive tendencies. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The quantitative component assessed writing anxiety levels, their correlation with academic performance, and effective anxiety-reducing strategies. The qualitative component included in-depth interviews to gain deeper insights into students' experiences. The findings reveal a strong negative correlation between writing anxiety and academic performance, with higher anxiety levels linked to lower grades and writing proficiency. Linguistic challenges, such as limited vocabulary and grammar issues, along with sociocultural factors like educational background, further intensify writing anxiety. The thesis emphasises the need for supportive, student-centered pedagogical approaches to alleviate anxiety and improve writing outcomes. Additionally, the study suggests the importance of tailored interventions that address both the psychological and linguistic aspects of writing anxiety. By synthesising theoretical insights with practical recommendations, this research contributes to enhancing writing proficiency and academic success among Malaysian diploma engineering students, offering pathways for future educational improvements.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Effective writing is a cognitively demanding skill that involves not only acquiring new knowledge but also comprehending, applying, and synthesising it. It encompasses more than adhering to writing conventions; it also involves creativity, problem-solving, reflection, and revision. However, writing remains a challenging task for many students, particularly non-native speakers such as Malaysian diploma engineering students, who struggle with organising thoughts and mastering language standards.

Researchers and language practitioners have increasingly focused on the challenges faced by second language (L2) learners in developing writing proficiency (Altukruni, 2019; Sabti et al., 2019; Badrasawi et al., 2020; Sun & Wang, 2020; Mohamad et al., 2022; Wahyuni & Umam, 2022; Rasool et al., 2023). Writing is often regarded as one of the most difficult and complex skills to master, as it requires higher-order thinking to organise ideas, compose coherent texts, and communicate complex concepts effectively (Suvin, 2020). Successful writing demands not only linguistic skill but also critical analysis, synthesis, and originality, which are essential for academic and professional success in today's globalised world.

Although writing is a complex and challenging skill, it is crucial for both first language (L1) and L2 learners due to its extensive use in academic studies. Alkubaidi (2018) demonstrated that writing can be particularly demanding for both L1 and L2 learners, reinforcing the idea that excelling in writing is difficult regardless of linguistic background. Li (2022) further corroborated this, revealing that even native speakers face similar writing challenges. This emphasises that mastering writing requires continuous practice, refining, and support, regardless of one's familiarity with the language. However, the difficulties in writing often lead to significant writing anxiety, especially among L2 learners.

Writing anxiety is prevalent among L2 learners, who experience tension, nervousness, and worry when engaging in writing tasks (Tsao, 2021). Studies indicate that ESL writers frequently suffer from anxiety due to limited vocabulary and