



## WRITING ANXIETY IN EFL STUDENTS: PERSONALITY TRAITS PERSPECTIVE

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### abstract

This study is aimed to investigate the distinction level of writing anxiety between introvert and extrovert English as a foreign language (EFL) pre-service teacher students. A qualitative case study methodology was utilized to explore a phenomenon within its authentic setting. A modified edition of the Second Language Writing Anxiety Scale (SLWAS) questionnaire by Y.-S. Cheng (2002) was used to compare both personalities. The study's participants were categorized based on their personality traits as either introverts (n=29) or extroverted (n=29), categorized according to their personality types. The results showed that introverted individuals have a higher level of anxiety in writing context than extroverted students, with an average score of 3.38. In addition, the results showed the relationship between personality traits and writing anxiety among EFL students. In conclusion, this study found that personality traits like introversion and extraversion can affect writing anxiety and performance. It's important to recognize and address these variations to support individuals with different personality types in improving their writing skills and reducing writing-related anxiety.

## INTRODUCTION

EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers are integral to their students' development as writers in English (Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Jaelani, 2017; Wei et al., 2020; L. J. Zhang & Qin, 2018). Overcoming writing anxiety is crucial for these educators, as they serve as role models, inspiring their students to approach writing with confidence and enthusiasm. Additionally, EFL teachers are responsible for creating essential teaching materials, such as lesson plans and worksheets, where strong writing skills are indispensable (Richards, 2006). They also provide constructive feedback on students' written work (Ab Hamid & Romly, 2021; Correa Pérez et al., 2013), requiring a confident and proficient approach to analysis and evaluation. Moreover, avoiding writing activities due to anxiety can limit students' exposure to vital practice. In essence, EFL teachers must conquer writing anxiety to effectively guide, motivate, and support their students in mastering the art of writing in English.

Indeed, according to the observations and findings of researchers, a considerable number of students still exhibit deficiencies in their writing abilities, with anxiety being one of the contributing factors. Writing anxiety, also known as "writer's block" or "writing apprehension," is a common challenge faced by students at various academic levels (Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2015; Badrasawi et al., 2016; Reeves, 1997). It can bring a fear of starting a writing task, self-doubt regarding students' writing abilities, or even a sense of perfectionism that blockade the creative flow. Writing anxiety can be described as a pervasive sense of discomfort, nervousness,

or unease that a writer may encounter prior to, during, or following their involvement in a writing assignment (Bloom, 1985; Hassan, 2001; Wynne et al., 2014). Writing anxiety is a prevalent obstacle that hampers students' writing skills (Cletzer et al., 2022; Khalil, 2022; Sabir et al., 2023). Many students experience anxiety or trepidation when confronted with writing assignments, resulting in diminished self-assurance and hindering their capacity to convey their thoughts effectively.

To that extent, writing anxiety among students is a complex phenomenon that exhibits significant variation between individuals, often influenced by a range of variables, one of which is personality. Personality factors can impact a person's language abilities and learning a new language, alongside anxiety (Griffiths, 2008; Marwa & Thamrin, 2016; Spitzley et al., 2022) and student personality plays a role in language learning (Abu-Rabia et al., 2014; Boroujeni et al., 2015). Personality, as defined by Larsen et al., (2005) in Boroujeni et al's., (2015) study (2015), encompasses a set of organized and typically enduring psychological qualities and mechanisms within an individual that influence how they interact with and adapt to their inner thoughts, physical surroundings, and social context. Similarly, according to Pervin & John (1997) in Masruddin & Pratiwi's research (2016), personality is characterized by structured psychological qualities and systems within individuals that shape their ability to interact with and adjust to their surroundings. In simpler terms, personality reflects the underlying connection between outward behavior, mental well-being, inner tendencies, and preferences for action (Haradasht & Baradaran, 2013). It's important to note that no two individuals are exactly alike, even identical twins, as they possess their own unique personalities (Cruickshank et al., 2003) (Cruickshank et al., 2003).

There are many theories that distinct between human personality. In the context of this research, the primary focus of investigation is around two specific personality types: introverts and extroverts. This interest has a longstanding history, dating back to Carl Jung's introduction of this theory in 1933, which he continued to refine until the mid-1970s (Hz, 2022). The examination of individuals' personalities through the scope of introversion or extroversion has been a subject of study for an extended period (Busch, 1982; Kayaoğlu, 2013; Y. Zhang, 2008). A noteworthy development occurred in 2009 when Dörnyei (2009) introduced a concept that garnered substantial attention from language researchers (Marashi & Naddim, 2019). Introverted students typically exhibit characteristics such as being reserved, preferring loneliness and independent work (Yeung et al., 2005). Consequently, introverted students are often associated with shyness and may hesitate to speak in front of large audiences (Yeung et al., 2005). In contrast, extroverted students are individuals perceived as enthusiastic and inclined toward socializing and group participation (Roccas et al., 2002). Consequently, outgoing individuals are generally seen as more outgoing and bolder in contrast to their quieter counterparts.

Introverted and extroverted students, for instance, may experience writing anxiety in distinct ways. Introverted individuals, known for their reflective and inward-focused nature, might encounter anxiety related to self-criticism and a fear of judgment (Brown, 2000; in Zainuddin, 2016). They may scrutinize their writing excessively and feel apprehensive about sharing their thoughts (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). On the other hand, extroverted students, who tend to be more outgoing and socially oriented, may experience anxiety related to the pressure of meeting audience expectations and producing work that garners approval. Introversion, often referred to as an introverted personality, is characterized by a strong focus on inner thoughts and feelings (Khoiriyah, 2016). Introverts tend to be consistently more anxious and prefer a calm and quiet environment to perform their best. They typically work better alone and only involve others after they've clarified their thoughts (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Additionally, introverts often

prefer written communication over verbal interactions. In contrast, extroverts are individuals who are lively, active, and sociable. An extroverted personality is associated with a liking for social interactions and a keen interest in people and the things happening around them (Khoiriyah, 2016).

In addition, an introvert is someone who tends to overanalyse their thoughts and may have a preference for solitude, leading to a withdrawal from social interactions (Freyd, 1924). On the other hand, an extrovert is characterized by a lesser inclination to dwell on their internal thoughts and a propensity to actively seek out social connections and engage with others (Freyd, 1924; Schmidt, 2016). While introverts tend to be quieter, gaining enjoyment from spending time alone, extroverts are more socially-present, thriving on the energy of those around them, often finding themselves the center of attention in large social groups (Tuovinen et al., 2020). This is not to say that introverts are anti-social, rather they gain enjoyment away from the overwhelming stimulation produced by social gatherings (Schmidt, 2016; Tuovinen et al., 2020).

Owing to, the relationship between anxiety and personality is closely linked to the individual's dopamine levels. Dopamine, a neurotransmitter, plays a vital role in regulating movement, motor skills, learning, working memory, cognitive functions, and emotions (Lieberman, 2000). Introverted individuals tend to have higher baseline levels of dopamine in their bodies. Consequently, when they are asked to present their writing to a community, it tends to elevate their anxiety and tension levels (Laney, 2002 in Zainuddin, 2016). In contrast, extroverts have lower dopamine levels, which helps stabilize their dopamine levels when they are required to present their work in front of an audience. This stabilization of dopamine levels contributes to reduced anxiety levels in extroverts during public performance.

The existing literature on writing anxiety among EFL students has focused on various factors that contribute to this phenomenon (e.g: Jawas, 2019; Jebreil et al., 2015; Liu & Ni, 2015). However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the relationship between EFL students' writing anxiety and their personality types. A study explored the relationship between EFL learners' personality types and writing anxiety, which found that extroversion, intuition, feeling, and judging types had a significant negative correlation with writing anxiety (Khabooshan & Saeedirad, 2022). This suggests that students with these personality types may experience less writing anxiety than those without these personality traits. However, further research is needed to confirm these findings and to explore the relationship between other personality types and writing anxiety among EFL students.

Understanding these personality-based differences in writing anxiety is crucial for educators and support systems. By recognizing that students' anxiety can manifest differently, educators can adopt strategies that cater to individual needs, creating a more inclusive and effective learning environment that helps all students, regardless of their personality traits, navigate and conquer writing anxiety. To That extent, this study is aimed to investigate the distinction level of writing anxiety between introvert and extrovert EFL students..

## **METHOD**

### **Design**

In this research, a qualitative case study methodology was utilized to explore a phenomenon within its authentic setting. The researcher employed diverse sources of data to ensure a thorough comprehension of the issue, steering clear of a singular viewpoint and considering various intricacies (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Data collection process followed a semi-structured approach, and the collected information was subsequently analysed using two distinct methods: quantitative data derived from student questionnaires, comprising 28 items that gauged their

levels of writing anxiety, were subjected to statistical calculations, while qualitative data underwent a constructive analysis, specifically involving the comparison of responses from different participants.

### Participants

In this research, 58 students were involved, with an equal split between introverted (29 students) and extroverted (29 students) individuals. These students were enrolled in the English Language Education Study Program at a state university in North Sumatra. The participants were asked to fill up a personality questionnaire to distinct their personality types. After completing the personality questionnaire, only participants' responses within level of personality above 70% selected to be the data. The selection of participants was done purposively from various classes, and all of them had successfully completed the Academic Writing course, which was a requirement for their semester credits. Additionally, each student had previously undertaken a sequence of writing classes during their earlier semesters, beginning with basic writing and advancing to intermediate and advanced writing classes.

### Procedure of Data Analysis

In the study's outset, the researchers provided the participants with a modified edition of the Second Language Writing Anxiety Scale (SLWAS), which was initially created by Cheng (2002). This scale comprised 28 items, and the participants were required to rate them on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. A score of 5 signified an extremely high level of anxiety, while a score of 1 denoted a low level of anxiety. Through the application of this scale, the researchers intended to evaluate and quantify the degree of writing anxiety experienced by the study's participants.

Table. 1. Anxiety Scale Ranging

Scale Ranging	Description
5	Extremely
4	Very
3	Moderately
2	Slightly
1	Not at all

The survey contained a total of 28 items, each of which was graded on a scale from 1 to 5. The highest achievable score on this scale is 140, signifying the utmost level of writing anxiety, whereas the lowest attainable score is 28, indicating the least amount of anxiety. Participants' responses were directly proportionate to their experienced level of anxiety. According to the self-reported scores, the researchers classified participants who scored 140 into three distinct categories: those with low anxiety (scores ranging from 1 to 46), moderate anxiety (scores ranging from 47 to 93), and high anxiety (scores ranging from 94 to 140).

To investigate the correlation between personality traits, the degree of anxiety, and students' encounters with second/foreign language writing anxiety, the information collected through the questionnaire was subjected to additional analysis and classification, considering the participants' personality types: extroverted versus introverted. This approach enabled the researchers to delve into how personality might impact students' experiences, approaches, and the intensity of anxiety they face when engaged in writing activities.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study evaluated the writing anxiety levels of participants by analysing their responses to the Second Language Writing Anxiety Scale (SLWAS) questionnaire developed by Cheng (2002). Participants were then grouped based on their personality traits as either introverts or extroverts, as indicated in the table. This categorization enabled a thorough investigation of writing anxiety levels among all the participants.

Table 2. Writing anxiety level of EFL pre-service teachers Based on Personality

Level	Introvert		Extrovert	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
High (94-140)	12	41.38	3	10.34
Moderate (47-93)	17	58.62	24	82.76
Low (1-46)	-	-	2	6.90

The findings present the distribution of writing anxiety levels among EFL pre-service teachers, categorized based on their personality traits as either introverts or extroverts. The table shows three distinct anxiety level categories: High, Moderate, and Low, with corresponding score ranges. Among the introvert group, 12 participants (41.38%) experienced high levels of writing anxiety, while 17 (58.62%) fell into the moderate anxiety level category. Notably, there were no introverts in the low anxiety level category. Conversely, in the extrovert group, 3 participants (10.34%) had high writing anxiety levels, 24 participants (82.76%) exhibited moderate anxiety levels, and 2 participants (6.90%) reported low anxiety levels in their foreign language writing.

Moreover, a comprehensive evaluation was carried out by comparing the questionnaire responses from all participants and counting the mean scores, enabling the researcher to reach the overall degree of anxiety related to foreign writing among the study participants. The findings are shown in the table provided below.

Table 3. Anxiety Level Average

Respondents	Anxiety Level Average	Level
Introvert	95.79	High
Extrovert	75.75	Moderate

The findings present the average anxiety levels among the study's respondents, categorized into introverts and extroverts. The introvert group had an average anxiety level of 95.79, falling within the "High" anxiety level category, indicating a substantial degree of anxiety towards writing. In contrast, the extrovert group exhibited an average anxiety level of 75.75, placing them in the "Moderate" anxiety level category, signifying a comparatively lower level of anxiety regarding foreign language writing. This table provides a clear overview of the different average anxiety levels between introverts and extroverts among the respondents, indicating on the variations in writing anxiety based on personality traits.

Additionally, the research separated the two respondent groups by their anxiety levels and comprehensively examined their answers to each questionnaire question. This detailed study helped the researchers better understand the specific factors causing anxiety in each group.

Table 4. Average of Anxiety Level between Two Personalities in Specific Points

No	Statements	Score	
		Intro-vert	Extro-vert
1	I feel anxious when I have to write in English.	2.90	2.28
2	I find it difficult to start writing in English.	3.07	2.21
3	I feel uncomfortable with grammar and spelling when writing in English.	3.55	2.62
4	I am unsure of my writing abilities in English.	3.41	2.69
5	I feel uneasy with the structure and format of writing in English.	3.28	2.59
6	I struggle to find the right words when writing in English.	3.66	2.79
7	I have difficulty expressing ideas and thoughts in English.	3.55	2.62
8	I lack confidence in writing in English.	3.21	2.52
9	I worry about the final outcome of my writing in English.	3.83	2.86
10	I find it challenging to choose the right words when writing in English.	3.55	3.07
11	I am not very confident in grammar and spelling when writing in English.	3.66	2.76
12	I am not very confident in constructing cohesive paragraphs in English.	3.66	3.31
13	I find it difficult to convey ideas and thoughts clearly in English.	3.79	2.93
14	I struggle to understand writing instructions in English.	3.28	2.59
15	I find it difficult to accept criticism or feedback in English about my writing.	2.21	2.24
16	I feel overwhelmed when writing English compositions under time constraints.	3.79	2.76
17	I feel nervous or sweaty when writing English compositions under time pressure.	3.07	2.31
18	My heart races when I write English compositions under time constraints.	3.10	2.38
19	I break into a cold sweat when suddenly asked to write in English.	2.79	2.21
20	I worry that my English writing is far worse than others.	3.55	3.07
21	My mind often goes blank when I start writing in English.	3.41	2.52
22	I usually do anything to avoid writing in English.	2.07	2.10
23	I go to great lengths to avoid situations where I have to write in English.	2.00	1.93
24	I fear that others will mock my English writing if they read it.	3.28	2.59
25	I am afraid my writing will be chosen as a sample for discussion in class.	3.72	2.72
26	If my English writing is to be evaluated, I am worried about getting a very low grade.	3.69	2.90
27	When writing in English, I often worry that the way I express and organize my ideas does not adhere to English writing conventions.	3.86	2.97
28	When writing in English, I often worry that my writing does not conform to cultural norms.	3.55	2.62
	Average	3.38	2.74

The table presents a comparison of responses to a set of statements assessing writing anxiety levels among two distinct groups of individuals, introverts and extroverts. The statements cover various aspects of writing anxiety, including concerns about language proficiency, self-confidence, handling criticism, time pressure, and conformity to writing conventions and cultural norms. On average, introverted participants reported a writing anxiety score of 3.38, suggesting a high level of anxiety, while extroverted participants had an average score of 2.74,

indicating a moderate level of anxiety in writing situations. These results offer insights into how personality traits can influence individuals' experiences of anxiety when writing in English.

## DISCUSSION

The most substantial distinction is in the point of “I am afraid my writing will be chosen as a sample for discussion in class”. In this issue, Introvert students possess 3.72, meanwhile Extrovert students in average have 2.72. This is because Introverted persons are people who prefer to dismiss more social interaction. This proves that an introvert is typically characterized by a tendency to overanalyse their thoughts and a preference for solitude, which often leads them to withdraw from social interactions (Freyd, 1924). In contrast, an extrovert is marked by a reduced inclination to ruminate on their inner thoughts and a strong inclination to actively seek social connections and engage with others (Freyd, 1924; Schmidt, 2016). While introverts are often quieter and find enjoyment in spending time alone, extroverts are more socially oriented, drawing energy from their interactions with others and frequently finding themselves at the centre of attention in larger social gatherings (Tuovinen et al., 2020). It's important to note that being introverted doesn't necessarily mean being anti-social; rather, introverts tend to derive pleasure from quieter, less socially stimulating environments (Schmidt, 2016; Tuovinen et al., 2020).

In addition, in point “When writing in English, I often worry that the way I express and organize my ideas does not adhere to English writing conventions”, Introverted students also possess higher anxiety than they who are Extrovert, in comparison of 3.86:2.97. This imply that Introverted individuals, renowned for their introspective and self-reflective tendencies, may experience anxiety linked to self-evaluation and a fear of being judged (Brown, 2000 in Zainuddin, 2016). They might engage in excessive self-scrutiny of their writing and feel uneasy about sharing their ideas (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). As well as, Introverts are typically more consistently anxious and thrive in a serene and quiet environment when striving for their best performance. They usually work more effectively on their own and only seek collaboration after they have clarified their thoughts (Richards & Schmidt, 2002).

In the context of "I fear that others will mock my English writing if they read it," introverted participants express a higher level of concern compared to their extroverted counterparts, with average scores of 3.28 and 2.59, respectively. This is in line with the statement of (Yeung et al., 2005), which stated introverted individuals are often known for their introspective and self-reflective nature, as well as their tendency to be more reserved in social interactions. This introspection can sometimes lead to heightened self-awareness and sensitivity to the opinions of others. When it comes to their English writing, introverted participants may worry more about potential criticism or mockery, as they are inclined to express their doubts and fears. This self-doubt may bring as a concern that their written work will not meet the standards or expectations of their peers. On the opposite, extroverted students are characterized as individuals who possess enthusiasm and display a strong inclination toward socializing and active group participation (Roccas et al., 2002). As a result, active individuals tend to be perceived as more active, socially engaging, and bolder in comparison to their introvert friends.

Overall, on average, introverted participants have a higher level of anxiety in writing context, with an average score of 3.38. In contrast, extroverted participants have a moderate level of anxiety, averaging 2.74. This implies the connection between anxiety and personality which is strongly associated with an individual's dopamine levels. Dopamine, a neurotransmitter, plays a crucial role in controlling various functions like movement, motor skills, learning, memory, cognitive abilities, and emotions (Lieberman, 2000). Introverted individuals typically have

higher baseline levels of dopamine in their bodies. Consequently, when they are tasked with presenting their writing to an audience, it tends to heighten their anxiety and stress levels (Laney, 2002; as cited by Zainuddin, 2016). In contrast, extroverts have lower dopamine levels, which helps maintain their dopamine levels when they are required to present their work in front of an audience. This stabilization of dopamine levels contributes to reduced anxiety levels in extroverts during public performances..

## CONCLUSION

In summary, introverted individuals tend to be more anxious and self-critical when it comes to their English writing, while extroverted individuals generally have greater confidence and ease in public writing settings. These differences can be attributed to their personality traits and the influence of neurotransmitters like dopamine. It's important to recognize and address these variations to support individuals with different personality types in improving their writing skills and reducing writing-related anxiety. In addition, this study found that personality traits like introversion and extroversion can affect writing anxiety and performance. Educators and support services should recognize this link and tailor their teaching approaches and support accordingly. Creating an inclusive and empathetic learning environment is crucial for helping all students develop their writing skills. Ultimately, the study highlights the importance of considering individual differences when evaluating and supporting writing performance.

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