

WRITING APPREHENSION IN ENGLISH AMONG JORDANIAN POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA (UUM)

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated writing apprehension among Jordanian postgraduate students studying at University Utara Malaysia (UUM). Jordanian students lack the ability to write in English at schools or universities level in Jordan because they do very little writing in English. This study had three main objectives: (1) to investigate the levels of Writing Apprehension among the Jordanian postgraduate students when writing in English at UUM (2) to investigate the relationship between age and socio-economic status with writing apprehension (3) to discover the writing situation that make the Jordanian postgraduate students feel most apprehensive when writing in English (writing a thesis, writing assignments, or writing journals). This study used a survey research design. The sampling of this study consisted of one hundred and three Jordanian postgraduate students at UUM. The instrument used in this study was Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) developed by Daly and Miller (1975) to measure writing apprehension. The results of this study showed that majority of the Jordanian postgraduate students experienced high level of writing apprehension. There was a significant relationship between age, socio-economic status and writing apprehension. For the open-ended question, majority of the respondents said that they experienced apprehension in writing a thesis more than writing assignments, or writing journals.

Keywords: Writing Apprehension, Survey Research Design, Jordanian Postgraduate Students, EFL.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a demanding task especially for second or foreign language learners. It has been found that most language learners at all levels believe that writing is one of the most difficult language skills to master (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Kurk & Atay, 2007; Latif, 2007) or a sophisticated skill compared with other skills (Daud et al., 2005; and Abu Shawish & Atea, 2010). The process of writing in English can be divided into three stages: pre-writing, free-writing, and re-writing (Hughey et al., 1983). However, Zamel (1983) describes the process of writing as nonlinear, exploratory, and generative whereby writers discover and generate ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning. The process of writing involves sub-processes of planning, collecting data, drafting, revising, rewriting and editing. These sub-processes of writing are dynamic, non-sequential and interactive processes not as sequential stages.

Arab learners of English which include Jordanians and Egyptians encounter major problems in writing. This problem has been discussed by many researchers such as Abdul Haq (1982); Abbad (1988); Wahba (1998); Rabab'ah (2005); and Huwari and Noor Hashima (2010). In fact, Salem (2007) states that second/ foreign learners face difficulties to write effectively because of the limited number

of vocabulary, idioms, cultural knowledge, less experience with second language rhetorical strategies, and the apprehension of writing. A study conducted by Salem (2007) explored the views of 50 male undergraduate students majoring in English in relation to writing in English at the University of Al-Azhar, Egypt. Most of the students felt overwhelmed when they were required to write on a certain topic. They did not know how to start, how to develop their ideas or how to conclude the essay. They also lacked the technical skills of writing acceptable compositions in English. They often repeated their ideas, reported few if any valid points, made serious mistakes in grammar and punctuation, and included irrelevant information.

Researchers such as Gungle & Taylor (1989); Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert (1999); Cornwell & McKay (1999); Hassan (2001); Al-Ahmad (2003); Cheng (2004); Daud et al. (2005); Rankin-Brown (2006); Atay & Kurt (2007); and Salem (2007) claim that most of the research on writing apprehension focused on native English learners. Little research has been focused on writing apprehension among second or foreign language learners. Latif (2007) suggests a need to investigate writing apprehension in specific second / foreign language contexts such as that of the Arabic EFL learners. From the researcher's observation, students in Jordan lack the ability to write in English at schools and universities level because they do very little writing in English. This has prompted the researcher to discover how the PhD Jordanian students studying abroad cope with writing in English.

Al- Ahmad (2003) asserts that "All the remarks of researchers in ESL/EFL field indicated that writing apprehension is a real problem facing ESL/EFL students' apprehension, and something should be done to reduce students' apprehension" (p. 33). He proceeds to mention that writing apprehension in the ESL/EFL holds more of a challenge as it affects the learners' writings more in a negative way. Researchers such as Jones, 1985; Gungle & Taylor, 1989; Masny & Foxall, 1992; Cornwell & McKay, 1999; and Al-Ahmad, 2003 assert that researchers give more attention to L2 context because of the complexity of the condition in second/foreign language. This study aims to investigate the levels of writing apprehension among Jordanian postgraduate students when writing in English at UUM. In addition, it intends to investigate the relationship between age, and socioeconomic status and writing apprehension. It also tries to discover the writing situation that led the Jordanian postgraduate students to feel most apprehensive when writing in English (writing a thesis, writing assignments, or writing journals).

Writing Apprehension

Writing apprehension is a serious problem that can hinder the performance of both native and nonnative learners. Daly and Miller (1975) introduced the term writing apprehension. Daly and Miller (1975, p. 11) defined writing apprehension as "A subjective complex of attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral interaction which reinforce each other". Researchers have used many terms to refer to writing apprehension such as anxiety and blocking (Rose, 1980, 1983; Gungle and Taylor, 1989; and Al-Ahmad, 2003). Daly and Miller (1975) regard writing apprehension as a complex term because of the complexity of writing. Writing tasks tend to increase students' anxiety levels because anxiety can lead students to be demotivated in writing, which in turn may cause them to have negative attitudes towards writing.

Daly and Miller (1975) suggest three levels of writing apprehension, ranging from high, moderate, and low level. A study conducted by Hanna (2010) found that writing apprehension might influence students at all levels even after they had graduated from the universities. In addition, students with high level of writing apprehension produced a paper of less quality than low apprehensive writers, avoided writing tasks whenever possible and procrastinated in their work (Hanna, 2010).

High level apprehensive students can be characterized as follows: (1) Write less (Smith, 1984; and Tighe, 1987), (2) Avoid writing classes (Daly and Miller, 1975; Book, 1976; Smith, 1984; Raimes, 1985; Tighe, 1987; Reeves, 1997; Salem, 2007; and Waston, 2007), (3) Use less intense language (Daly & Miller, 1975), (4) Face difficulties in choosing topics to write about, write fewer statements,

words in general and short essays, develop their ideas incompletely, lack knowledge of usage and grammar such as using fewer -ly words, comma, and less punctuation compared with low apprehensive writers (Book, 1976; Daly, 1977; Rose, 1980, 1983; Faigley et al., 1981; and Reeves, 1997), (5) Like to procrastinate in their works (Bloom, 1981; Faigley et al., 1981; Reeves, 1997; and Salem, 2007), (6) May behave destructively (Bloom, 1981), (7) Less confident and less successful (Daly and Miller, 1975; Daly, 1979; Rose, 1980, 1983; and Waston, 2007), (8) Have lower self esteem (Reeves, 1997; and Salem, 2007), (9) Like to choose courses and careers that they believe involve little writing (Reeves, 1997), (10) Have a few writing role models at home, in school, and in the society at large (Reeves, 1997), (11) Write very little out of class (Raimes, 1985; and Reeves, 1997), (12) Score lower on tests of verbal ability (SAT), reading comprehension, and standardized tests of writing ability used for college placement (Daly, 1978; and Reeves, 1997), and (13) Lack of motivation in writing (Reeves, 1997).

Research done on apprehensive graduate students discovered that students with high level of writing apprehension had written a paper or proposal that was undeveloped compared to those with low level of writing apprehension (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2001). A study conducted by Erkan and Saban (2011) on EFL context in Çukurova University (YADIM), Turkey discovered that many of the students left the classroom without trying to write even a few sentences when it came to the writing sections of the examinations. This suggests that the students were extremely apprehensive. It is reasonable to speculate that success in writing in a foreign language may be related to attitudes towards writing, apprehension about writing, and self-efficacy in writing (Erkan and Saban, 2011). Phillips (1968, p. 42) says that “highly apprehensive individuals will avoid communication situations or react in some anxious manner if forced into them because they foresee primarily negative consequences from such engagements”. Daly & Miller (1975) discover that writing apprehension can be associated with the tendency of people to approach or avoid writing. Highly apprehensive students will avoid writing whenever possible.

Abu Shawish and Atea (2010) conducted a study which involved 265 undergraduate students at three universities: Al-Aqsa University, Al-Quds University, and Islamic University. The study found that gender had no significant role in writing apprehension for the following factors (affective, cognitive, linguistics, teaching practice, students' behavior) except feedback. Females were found to be more sensitive to the teachers' feedback compared to males. In terms of students' academic level, i.e. sophomore, junior or senior, it was found not to have any influence on writing apprehension or the estimates of the remedies of writing apprehension except for linguistic factor where the difference was in favor of juniors. It was found that Islamic University of Gaza students were more apprehensive than those of Al-Quds Open University and Al-Aqsa University, particularly in teaching practices. A statistically significant difference in favor of the same group of students was also found in their estimates of the writing apprehension remedies. In addition, high achievers in writing classes displayed high apprehensiveness compared to low achievers and no difference was found between their estimates of the remedies of writing apprehension. Computer use in writing was found not to play any significant role in the students' estimates of the causes as well as the remedies of writing apprehension.

In summary, researchers believe that writing apprehension is a complex term and also a critical problem which may be faced by both native and non-native English learners. Writing apprehension will eventually impact the learners' learning process. Researchers have considered writing apprehension as synonymous with writing anxiety or blocks while others have categorized it into two main levels i.e. high apprehensive writers and low apprehensive writers.

METHODOLOGY

A survey research design was employed in this study because it collects quantitative, numbered data using a questionnaire and statistically analyses the data to describe trends about responses to questions

(Creswell, 2008). This method is suitable to fulfill the objectives of this study. The Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) developed by Daly and Miller (1975) was used to collect the data for this study. The total number of Jordanian postgraduate students at UUM for academic year 2011-2012 was 125 students. The sample size for this study was one hundred and three Jordanian postgraduate students at UUM. The students were selected using simple random sampling. According to Creswell (2008), this type of sampling enables the individuals in the selected population to obtain equal chance to participate in a study.

INSTRUMENT

In order to achieve the objectives and goals of this quantitative research, the researcher used one instrument, that is, the Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) which was developed by Daly and Miller (1975). The researcher divided the questionnaire into two parts: Part A consisted of demographic information such as age and socio-economic status. Part B consisted of 26 questions. The WAT (26 items) is a Likert-type self-report scale with five possible answers for each item from (1) strongly agree to (5) strongly disagree. Examples of the items are like: "I am not good at writing", "I look forward to writing down my ideas", "Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time", "Discussing my writing with others is an enjoyable experience", and "I don't like my compositions to be evaluated".

DATA ANALYSIS

This research used three techniques to answer the research questions. Hierarchical cluster was used to answer the first research question. The second research question used ANOVA. Lastly, the third research question used frequency. The quantitative data collected from WAT was analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study are presented based on the research questions. The first question is: What are the levels of Writing Apprehension among the Jordanian postgraduate students when writing in English at UUM? The result of this study showed that majority of the Jordanian postgraduate students at UUM faced high level of writing apprehension, that is 74 (71.8%); followed by moderate level of writing apprehension, that is 27 (26.2%); the rest of the respondents experienced low level of writing apprehension, that is 2 (1.9%).

Table 1: Average Linkage (Between Groups)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	74	71.8	71.8
	2	27	26.2	98.1
	3	2	1.9	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

The finding of this study supports other findings in ESL/EFL context. Researchers such as Stapa, 1994, 1998; Cornwell & McKay, 1999; Hassan, 2001; Al-Ahmad, 2003; Salem, 2007; Latif, 2007; and Takahashi, 2009 discovered in their studies that the ESL/EFL students experienced high level of writing apprehension. This study shows that the Jordanian postgraduate students at UUM faced apprehension when writing in English. Teachers or lecturers need to be aware of high apprehensive learners in writing. The respondents of this study experienced some characteristics when writing in English such as avoiding writing, less writing outside the classes, and facing difficulties in choosing a topic to write. This finding on characteristics is similar to other studies such as avoided writing classes (Daly and Miller, 1975; Book, 1976; Smith, 1984; Raimes, 1985; Tighe, 1987; Reeves, 1997;

Salem, 2007; and Waston, 2007), did not often practice writing outside the classroom (Smith, 1984; and Tighe, 1987), experienced difficulties in choosing topics to write about and always came up with short essays (Book, 1976; Daly, 1977; Rose, 1980, 1983; Hays, 1981; Faigley et al., 1981; and Reeves, 1997).

The second question for this study is: Is there a relationship between age, Socio-Economic status with writing apprehension? The result shows that the relationship between age and writing apprehension is significant. A two-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of age on writing apprehension, as measured by Writing Apprehension Test (WAT). Respondents were divided into three groups according to their age: Group 1: 21-30 years, i.e. 53 respondents (50.5%); Group 2: 31-40 years, i.e. 35 respondents (33.3%); Group 3: 41-50 years, i.e.15 respondents (13.3%). The interaction effect between age groups and writing apprehension is statistically significant, $F(192.425)$, $p = (0,000)$.

Table 2
ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	33.600	2	16.800	192.425	.000
Within Groups	8.731	100	.087		
Total	42.330	102			

Table 3
Descriptive

Age Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Percent
21-30	53	3.1358	.28561	50.5
31-40	35	4.0314	.30367	33.3
41-50	15	4.6333	.31091	13.3
Total	103	3.6583	.64421	100.0

The first variable in this study is age. The result shows that there is a significant relationship between age and writing apprehension. Research has shown that age is one of the variables that affect writing apprehension. In other words, age can affect a writer's product. Usually, younger writers are more apprehensive than older ones due to the lack of experience.

The second variable in this study is socio-economic status, a two-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of Socio-Economic Status on writing apprehension, as measured by Writing Apprehension Test (WAT). Respondents were divided into three groups according to their Socio-Economic status (Group 1: Low income group, i.e. 28 respondents (26.7%); Group 2: Middle income group, i.e. 60 respondents (57.1%); Group 3: High income group, i.e. 15 respondents (14.3%)). The interaction effect between Socio-Economic status and writing apprehension is statistically significant, $F(8.669)$, $p = (0,000)$. This study shows that there is a significant relationship between socio-economic status and writing apprehension. Researchers have shown that socio-economic status is one of the variables that affect writing apprehension. Usually, poor or low socio-economic status writers are more apprehensive than those with high socio-economic status.

Table 4
ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6.255	2	3.128	8.669	.000
Within Groups	36.075	100	.361		
Total	42.330	102			

The third question in this study is an open-ended question: What situation make you feel most apprehensive when writing in English (Writing a thesis, Writing assignments, or Writing Journals)?. Majority of the respondents in this study stated that they felt apprehensive when writing a thesis more i.e. 53 (51.5%), than writing journals, i.e. 30 (29.1%) or writing assignments, i.e. 20 (19.4%). This result is similar to Gurel's (2010) study. He claims that most research have been done on dissertation writing of advanced academic writing students which focus on the structural analysis of dissertation sections, across disciplines, tracing the course of dissertation writing, and thesis/dissertation supervision. So, there is a need for more studies to investigate the apprehension of writing dissertations among ESL/EFL contexts. The present study has shown that Jordanian postgraduate students experienced apprehension in writing a thesis or dissertation. It is important for the supervisors of the Jordanian postgraduate students at UUM specifically to be aware of their students' problems in writing in English language.

Table 5
Situations

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Thesis	53	51.5	51.5	51.5
	Assignments	20	19.4	19.4	70.9
	Journals	30	29.1	29.1	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

CONCLUSION

The objectives of this study were (1) To investigate the levels of Writing Apprehension among the Jordanian postgraduate students when writing in English at UUM, (2) to investigate the relationship between age and socio-economic status with writing apprehension, (3) to discover the writing situation that make the Jordanian postgraduate students feel most apprehensive when writing in English (writing a thesis, writing assignments, or writing journals).

The result of this study shows that majority of the Jordanian postgraduate students in UUM experienced high level of writing apprehension. This study also indicates that there is a positive relationship between age and socio-economic status with writing apprehension. Lastly, it discovers that majority of the respondents expressed most apprehensive when writing a thesis compared to writing assignments or writing journals.

FURTHER RESEARCH

It is suggested that more studies should be done on writing apprehension in ESL/EFL context. There is a need to investigate the causes of apprehension when writing a thesis. Research can also be done on strategies that students use to reduce their high level of writing apprehension. More research on writing apprehension using qualitative research methodology need to be done because most of the research on writing apprehension used quantitative research.

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