

Factors affecting male and female Indonesian EFL students' writing anxiety

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ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at investigating the writing anxiety levels of foreign language learners and factors affecting the foreign language writing anxiety levels on the learners based on the gender variable. It applies close-ended questionnaires as instruments to collect the data, adopted from Cheng (2004) about Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), and Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory (CWAI) questionnaire adopted from Younas, Subhani, Arshad, Arkam, and Maria (2014). The results of the study show that Indonesian English learners suffered a mediocre level of English writing anxiety, especially cognitive anxiety, as a preference. In relation to gender, female students tend to have significantly higher anxiety levels than males in terms of writing English compositions. The study reports that both male and female learners suffered from anxiety due to lack of linguistic competence.

Keywords: English composition; gender; linguistic competence

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INTRODUCTION

In language learning, anxiety can lead to weakening the potential of students to learn a second language (L2) or a foreign language (FL) from the students' psychological aspects. Fear, anxiety, and worry will make it difficult for them to concentrate (Marwan, 2007; Voorhess, 1994; Wei, 2012). People, who have psychological problems in learning a foreign language, when they are suffering from an anxiety reaction that blocks them from succeeding in a foreign language class, can be categorized as having foreign language anxiety.

As introduced by Cheng (2002), in terms of anxiety in language skills, writing has been a major concern for English as Foreign Language practitioners and researchers. Writing activity is an activity which is full of emotions in addition to cognitive aspects. The writing process contributes to the development of the ability of the students to obtain the strategies needed in their learning processes, such as analysis, synthesis, and inference (Bacha, 2002).

In relation to the study of writing anxiety, gender has become one of determining variables that influences the level of anxiety. In her research, Cheng (2002) who investigated 165 students majoring in English, in one university in Northern Taiwan, focusing on the writing anxiety by gender, reveals that there is a significant effect of gender on the level of English writing anxiety. The finding shows that female learners suffered a higher level of English writing anxiety than men. The result of the study is also supported by Mathew, Liz, Tareq, and Islam (2013) and Jafari and Ansari (2012) who found that female learners outperform male learners in writing anxiety.

In another case, women do not have higher anxiety than men. Jebreil, Akbar, and Habib (2015) who investigated 45 Iranian EFL learners, 26 females and 19 males majoring in English language teaching, found that male learners suffer a greater amount of anxiety related to their writing performance. In addition, Na (2007) found that male learners have higher anxiety than female learners in Chinese EFL classrooms. Therefore, learners

indeed have comparatively high anxiety in English learning depending on their gender (Berk, 2017).

Apart from gender, in the process of EFL writing, there are several causes that make the learners often feel anxious about the compositions they make. A study conducted by Wahyuni and Umam (2017), who involved 50 learners of English as a foreign language, reveals that most of the EFL students avoid an FL writing activity because they are anxious about the essay they make. They feel anxious due to the fact that they are not good at grammar, or they are anxious when their essays would be evaluated. In addition, Al-Shboul and Ibrahim (2015) report that lack of knowledge in English grammar, negative attitudes toward writing, negative writing experiences in the past and inadequate knowledge in academic writing are the causes of writing anxiety.

The present study tries to shed light on different perspectives about foreign language writing anxiety. Though some studies focus on the level of anxiety and their gender (Cheng, 2002; Jafari et al., 2012; Marwan, 2007; Mathew et al., 2013), this study tries to investigate not only the level of foreign language writing anxiety and gender, but also the causal factors which influence the level of writing anxiety of Indonesian EFL students. Further, in terms of the method and data, instead of using a mixed-method design on Iranian EFL student to find the level, types and the causes of writing anxiety (Rezaei & Jafari, 2014), this study focuses on a quantitative technique in order to investigate types, levels, and causes of Indonesian learner writing anxiety. By using different methods and data, this study expectantly can offer an alternative perspective in analyzing, types, levels, and causes of writing anxiety.

Foreign Language Writing Anxiety (FLWA)

Cheng (2004), divides FLWA into three types: cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior.

Cognitive anxiety refers to mental aspects when experiencing anxiety, including negative expectations, a performance that influences the mind, and worries about the other's perceptions (Cheng, 2004; Craft, Magyar, Becker, & Feltz, 2003). In other words, cognitive anxiety is related to the activity and process in the human brain when experiencing anxiety, such as having thought of failure like 'I will never finish it' and self-insulting like 'I am very bad at writing'.

Somatic anxiety refers to a person's perception of the physiological effects of anxiety which is reflected in an increasing autonomous stimulus and unpleasant feelings, such as anxiety and tension (Cheng, 2004; Morris, Davis, & Hutchings 1981). In other words, somatic anxiety is related to the conditions of the human body (physical) when they feel anxious, such as sweating, trembling, headaches, and increasing heart rate.

Avoidance behavior refers to the aspects of attitudes or behaviors when someone feels anxious (Cheng, 2004). For example, students will tend to use their first language when they have options related to what language they use for writing. Feeling anxious to write compositions using

English as a foreign language might be the reason why they suffer avoidance behavior.

Causal factors of writing anxiety

Younas et al. (2014) report in his study that there are several factors which influence students in writing a foreign language. They are fear of getting a negative evaluation, lack of writing practice in a foreign language, not enough mastery of writing technique, and lack of knowledge on topics that will be discussed. In addition, having lots of linguistic problems (grammar, diction, and vocabulary), the pressure to work on foreign language essays perfectly, time pressure, lack of confidence are also the factors which contribute to students writing anxiety.

Ohata (2005) reports that fear of negative evaluation is one of the componential sources of language anxiety in L2 activities that the students perform in the classroom. Students usually worry about their compositions in a foreign language of being evaluated by the teachers or their peers. In some cases, the apprehension of other evaluation could result in the feelings of embarrassment that their writing compositions are criticized in front of other students. Due to the fear of getting a bad evaluation, students are unconsciously demanded to write the compositions perfectly. Consequently, they are afraid of their peers ridiculing their compositions when they are not perfect.

Apart from the fear of evaluation, students often feel anxious due to their lack of linguistic capabilities in the target language (Zhang & Jian, 2012). The responsibility of writing in a foreign language grammatically may lead the students to be frustrated if they do not have comprehensive linguistic skills, including the grammar and vocabulary of the target language. The techniques of writing and sufficient practices also determine the level of students' writing anxiety. Younas et al. (2014) report that sufficient writing practices and awareness of writing techniques can decrease the level of writing anxiety among students.

In some cases, the students feel anxious if they write foreign language compositions, especially during the exam. The situation and context of doing the exam obligate the students to work in time pressure. Based on the results of a study (Younas et al., 2014), 50% of the respondents agree that time pressure is one of the causes of anxiety while writing in English. The pressure could also increase if the students experience a lack of knowledge on the topics and need to write compositions using a foreign language during an exam. Moreover, having many assignments to be completed is also pressure. They may feel anxious if they cannot complete their assignment at the appointed time.

Due to a lack of knowledge on the topics or having linguistic problems, the students will not be confident to write compositions in a foreign language. Younas et al. (2014) report that students may feel anxious to start writing compositions if they think they have lots of problems related to the writing activities and this might be the main cause of second language writing anxiety.

Although, some studies (Ohata, 2005; Younas et al., 2014; Zhang & Jian, 2012) focused on causal factors in writing anxiety have been conducted before, it has not yet clarified that how the relationship between gender and the causal factors in writing anxiety. Therefore, this study tries to analyze not only the types and the level of writing anxiety, but also the factors that cause writing anxiety based on gender variables.

METHOD

Participants

The study involved 260 students of the English Department, in a Public University in East Java, Indonesia, consisting of 170 female and 90 male students, as a sample randomly taken from 404 students which are 293 female and 111 male. The minimum number of female and male sample is decided based on desired accuracy (Cochran, 1977; Gill, Johnson, & Clark, 2010;), where 95% confidence level, 5% margin of error, and 50% variance of the population.

Research instrument

The data were obtained by distributing two close-ended questionnaires, namely the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) and the Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory (CWAI). Both questionnaires use the Likert scale which consists of 5 points from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). 22 items of the SLWAI questionnaire (Cheng, 2004) in this research were used to determine the level of anxiety of English writing of the English Department students, while 10 items of CWAI questionnaire (Younas et al., 2014) are applied to determine what factors which influence the level of anxiety in English writing at the same department.

Research procedure

After the data were obtained, they were processed by inputting the Likert scale results of both questionnaires into a computer file. Then, the data were grouped into two categories: the results of the CWAI questionnaire and the results of the SLWAI questionnaire. For the results of CWAI questionnaire, the data were processed by summing the Likert scale of each item, which is item 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and divided by the sample size.

For the results of the SLWAI questionnaire, the data were classified into three parts, namely cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior. To classify the data on cognitive anxiety, the items used were 1, 3, 8, 10, 17, 21, 24, and 26. In somatic anxiety, the items used were 2, 7, 9, 13, 15, 18, and 23. In avoidance behavior, the items used were 4, 6, 12, 14, 19, 22, and 27. The items 1, 4, 8, 21, 22, 26, and 27 had an inverted Likert scale calculation system: if the respondent chose “strongly agree” on the item then the value scale is 1, and vice versa. The remaining items were not used due to the difficulties of categorizing them into the three types (Cheng, 2004).

In processing the data, they were grouped into 3 categories, which are high, medium, and low levels of anxieties (Wahyuni & Umam, 2017). High-level anxiety

is obtained by a condition if the number of the Likert scale on items is more than 73.33 (73), a low level is obtained by a condition if the number of the Likert scale on items is lower than 58.67 (59), and if the number is between the two levels, it is considered a medium level.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed by applying SPSS version 16 based on the type of anxieties, which are cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior, and their means based on gender variables. Furthermore, the descriptive statistic of the results of the CWAI questionnaire and means of the CWAI questionnaire based on gender variables are also described.

RESULTS

The level of English writing anxiety between female and male students

Table 1 presents the result of the SLWAI questionnaire in determining the students’ anxiety level in English writing.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics based on the type of anxiety

Anxiety	N	Sum	Mean	Std. dev
Cognitive	260	6097	23.45	5.286
Somatic	260	5213	20.05	4.740
Avoidance behavior	260	4641	17.85	3.066
Total			61.35	

Based on Table 1, the most dominant anxiety is cognitive anxiety with a total value of 6097, followed by somatic anxiety with a value of 5213, and avoidance behavior with a value of 4641. The anxiety level of the students is determined by the total means of each type of anxiety. According to the total score (61.35), the anxiety level of the English Department students in writing English composition as a whole is at the medium level (between 59 and 73).

Table 2. Cognitive anxiety descriptive statistics

Item	N	Sum	Mean
1	260	676	2.60
3	260	754	2.90
8	260	858	3.30
10	260	819	3.15
17	260	663	2.55
21	260	715	2.75
24	260	793	3.05
26	260	819	3.15
Total			23.45

As the dominant anxiety (23.45), cognitive anxiety is the most serious problem experienced by the students. Based on the results of the questionnaire, generally, the students are still worried that their English composition is worse than others. It was presented in Table 2 that item 8 is an item with the highest mean (3.3) followed by item 10 (3.15) and 26 (3.15). Items 10 and 26 suggest that the students are worried if their English composition will get a very bad score.

Item 17, in which they are afraid of their friends mocking their English compositions when they read them, has the smallest value with a mean of 2.55. This indicates that the students are not afraid or worried if their friends will mock their English composition.

Table 3. Cognitive anxiety means based on gender variables

Item	Male	Female
1	2.2	2.7
3	2.4	3.1
8	2.0	3.7
10	2.2	3.5
17	2.0	2.7
21	2.6	2.8
24	2.6	3.2
26	2.8	3.3
Total	18.8	25.0

Interestingly, male and female respondents have different dominant values on cognitive anxiety. For male respondents, they are afraid of being rated as very poor by lecturer. It can be seen from table 3 with a mean of 2.8 on item 26. On the other hand, female respondents tend to be worried that their English compositions are worse than others which are indicated with the mean value of 3.7 on item 8. Further, the lowest mean value for men (2) is on items 17 and 21 and for women (2.7) is on items 1 and 17. The scores indicate that both respondents do not worry at all if their peers will ridicule their English composition. Moreover, male respondents think that they are not afraid or worried if their English composition is worse than others. On the other hand, female respondents do not feel nervous at all when writing English compositions.

Based on the independent sample t-test of table 3, the number of Sig. (2-tailed) is $0,000 < 0,05$. Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference between male and female cognitive anxiety means value. Further, there are different values in the total number of means on cognitive anxiety based on gender differences. For men, it has a total mean value of 18.8, while women have a total mean value of 25, meaning that the cognitive anxiety level of the female students is significantly higher than the male ones.

In physiological aspects, the students generally feel their heart beat faster when they write English compositions, which is denoted by the mean value 3.4 of item 2 in table 4. Then, it is followed by item 15 with mean 3.34, where they often feel panic when writing English compositions under a time constraint. On the other hand, item 23 is the item with the smallest mean (2.2). The value indicates that when writing English compositions, the students hardly ever feel rigid and tense.

Table 5 presents gender variables which show that male respondents have the highest mean in somatic anxiety on item 15 (3), where they often feel panic when writing English compositions under the time constraint. On the other hand, female respondents have the highest mean on item 2 (3.6), where their hearts beat faster when

they write the English composition under the time constraint. Furthermore, the smallest mean between female and male respondents falls into the same item 23 with mean value 2.2, where they hardly ever feel rigid and tense when writing English compositions. In addition, male respondents also have the smallest mean besides item 23, which is item 9. The small score on item 9 indicates that male students do not often tremble and sweat when they write English compositions under the time pressure. Furthermore, based on the independent sample t-test of table 5, the number of Sig. (2-tailed) is $0,066 > 0,05$. Therefore, there is no statistically significant difference between male and female somatic anxiety means values.

Table 4. Somatic anxiety descriptive statistics

Item	N	Sum	Mean
2	260	884	3.4
7	260	728	2.8
9	260	702	2.7
13	260	780	3.0
15	260	871	3.35
18	260	674	2.6
23	260	572	2.2
Total			20.05

Table 5. Somatic anxiety means based on gender variables

Item	Male	Female
2	2.8	3.6
7	2.6	2.9
9	2.2	2.9
13	2.4	3.2
15	3.0	3.5
18	2.6	2.6
23	2.2	2.2
Total	17.8	20.8

In table 6, there are two highest means in the same items related to avoidance behavior: items 4 and 22 with a mean value of 3.1. This value indicates that the respondents often choose to write their ideas in another language, not English. This also happens when they are outside the classroom. Further, item 12 has the smallest mean (2.05), which indicates that the students hardly ever avoid a situation where they must write in English. Based on the gender variables, Table 7 presents the highest means for avoidance behavior between male and female respondents located in different items. For male respondents, the highest mean is item 22 (3.2), while female respondents are item 4 (3.3). This indicates that male respondents often avoid writing their idea in English, while female respondents avoid every opportunity to write compositions in English outside the classroom. In addition, the table also depicts that male respondents have the smallest mean of items 6 and 12 with a value of 2 and female respondents have the smallest mean of 2.1 on items 12 and 27. This shows that male students have a small chance to avoid a situation where they are required to write compositions in English. In contrast, female students sometimes use English when

they have an opportunity to write compositions. Further, based on the independent sample t-test of table 7, the number of Sig. (2-tailed) is $0,832 > 0,05$. Therefore, there is no statistically significant difference between male and female avoidance behavior means values.

Referring to the independent sample t-test of the mean value of each item in second language writing anxiety inventory (see Table 8), which consists of the types of anxiety; cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior; related to gender variables, the number of Sig. (2-tailed) is $0,002 < 0,05$. Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference between male and female anxiety levels. The anxiety level of English writing for female students (63.7) is significantly higher than male students (54.2). The result appears to be in parallel with the findings of Cheng's study (2002), where female students experienced English writing anxiety higher than men. Regarding the level of anxiety, male students' value falls into a low level (54.2). On the contrary, female students' level of anxiety falls into the medium level (63.7).

Table 6. Avoidance behavior descriptive statistic

Item	N	Sum	Mean
4	260	806	3.10
6	260	559	2.15
12	260	533	2.05
14	260	741	2.85
19	260	598	2.30
22	260	806	3.10
27	260	598	2.03
Total			17.85

Table 7. Avoidance behavior means based on gender variables

Item	Male	Female
4	2.6	3.3
6	2	2.2
12	2	2.1
14	2.6	2.9
19	2.2	2.3
22	3.2	3.1
27	3	2.1
Total	17.6	17.9

Table 8. Means of the type of anxiety based on gender variables

Anxiety	Male	Female
Cognitive	18.8	25
Somatic	17.8	20.8
Avoidance Behavior	17.6	17.9
Total	54.2	63.7

The causal factors of English writing anxiety between female and male students

Table 9 presents the results of the CWAI questionnaire in determining factors that influence the level of anxiety in English writing of the English Department students.

In Table 9, item 5 has the highest mean (3.85) indicating that linguistic problems, such as lack of mastery of grammar, diction, vocabulary, become the main factors that make the students feel anxious when they write compositions in English. These students may

feel anxious when writing in a foreign language because they lack linguistic abilities in order to express their idea in the target language (Zhang & Jian, 2012).

Additionally, item 2 is the item with the second highest mean with a value of 3.75 which indicates that the students do not only lack linguistic abilities, but they also feel anxious because they lack practices in writing English. These two factors are interrelated, where linguistic problems occur because they do not have enough practice in writing in English. Moreover, they also feel anxious due to lack mastery of writing techniques in English which is indicated by the mean value on item 3 (3.65).

Table 9. Descriptive statistic of the results of CWAI questionnaire

Item	N	Sum	Mean
1	260	819	3.15
2	260	975	3.75
3	260	949	3.65
4	260	884	3.4
5	260	1001	3.85
6	260	884	3.4
7	260	845	3.25
8	260	741	2.85
9	260	663	2.55
10	260	715	2.75

In regard to the results of the CWAI questionnaire based on the gender variables as presented in table 10, items 2, 3, and 5 remain the dominant factors among male and female respondents. Apart from those items, item 6 has the same mean value of 3.4, where male students are under pressure when they are required to write English compositions perfectly. On the other hand, for female respondents, apart from items 2, 3, and 5, item 4 has the same mean value as item 3 (3.7). This indicates that female students feel anxious because they do not know what they would write about related to the topics given. In other words, the cognitive ability of female students becomes the factor that influences their level of anxiety when writing in English.

Table 10. Means of CWAI questionnaire based on gender variables

Item	Male	Female
1	2.2	3.5
2	3.4	3.9
3	3.4	3.7
4	2.6	3.7
5	3.4	4.0
6	3.4	3.4
7	2.4	3.5
8	2.4	3.0
9	1.8	2.8
10	2.6	2.8
Total	27.6	34.3

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the study, it was found that cognitive anxiety is the dominant anxiety where the

students are worried that their English compositions are worse than others' and they feel anxious when their compositions which are being evaluated will get a poor score. In accordance with Wahyuni and Umam (2017) and Rezaei and Jafari (2014), it is linear that cognitive anxiety is the dominant problem engaged by the students.

However, this current research reports that Indonesian EFL learners suffer a medium level of anxiety which contrasts with Wahyuni and Umam (2017) who found the anxiety level of Indonesian EFL learners is dominantly high. These different results may be caused by the different contexts where the students are being taught by the institutions. The other reason, the causal factors between the students are relatively different. In Wahyuni and Umam's study (2017), the factors which cause the students suffering from high anxiety are lack of grammatical skills, or they are anxious when their essays would be evaluated. Further, in Rezaei and Jafari's (2014), fear of teacher's negative feedback, low self-confidence, and poor linguistic knowledge are the main sources. In this study, instead of fear of negative evaluation or feedback from the teacher and low self-confidence, the students mostly feel anxious due to lack of linguistic abilities, and they also feel anxious because they lack practices in writing English. These two factors are interrelated, where linguistic problems occur because they do not have enough practice in writing in English. Moreover, they also feel anxious because of the lack of writing technique mastery in English. In summary, those factors are related to the cognitive ability of the students in learning English as their FL.

In relation to gender, the anxiety level of female students is higher than males. This result is linear with Mathew et al. (2013), Jafari and Ansari (2012) and Cheng (2002) who find that females outperform males in writing anxiety. The results of the current study report that both male and female students highly suffer cognitive anxiety. However, they are cognitively different when they are experiencing anxiety. Male students tend to feel afraid if they get a very bad score when they write English compositions. On the other hand, female respondents tend to be worried that their English compositions are worse than others. Interestingly, both males and females experience anxiety because of the same factors. They feel anxious due to a lack of linguistic abilities. Male students tend to be under pressure when they are required to write the English composition perfectly. In contrast, female students feel anxious because they lack cognitive information toward the topics which are given when they write English compositions.

CONCLUSION

Generally, the students suffer a medium level of writing anxiety. As one of the anxiety types, cognitive anxiety becomes the dominant issue that refers to the students' mental aspects when experiencing anxiety. They feel worried when they think that their English compositions are a lot worse than others' and they feel anxious when their composition will get a poor score if it is evaluated.

They think they lack linguistic abilities, practices in writing English, and mastery of writing techniques in English

Female Indonesian learners of English as a foreign language tend to have significantly higher anxiety levels than males in terms of writing English compositions. Although both have high cognitive anxiety, they suffer in different ways. Male tends to feel afraid if they get a very bad score when they write English composition. On the other hand, female respondents tend to be worried that their English composition is worse than others. The reasons show that both males and females suffer anxiety due to a lack of linguistic ability.

The study implies that teachers should be aware of the factors affecting the anxiety experienced by male and female students when they are learning to write in English.

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APPENDICES

Questionnaire – Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) (Cheng, 2004)

Name :
 Student number :
 Sex :
 Grades :
 Phone number :

Notes: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neither agree nor disagree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

ITEM	STATEMENT	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	While writing in English I'm not nervous at all. (R)					
2	I feel my heart pounding when I write English compositions under time pressure.					
3	While writing English compositions, I feel worried and uneasy if I know they will be evaluated.					
4	I often choose to write down my thoughts in English. (R)					
6	I usually do my best to avoid writing English compositions.					
7	My mind often goes blank when starting to work on an English composition.					
8	I don't worry that my English compositions are a lot worse than others'. (R)					
9	I tremble or perspire when I write English compositions under time pressure.					
10	If my English composition is to be evaluated, I would worry about getting a very poor grade.					
12	I do my best to avoid situations in which I have to write in English.					
13	My thoughts become jumbled when I write English compositions under time constraint.					
14	Unless I have no choice, I would not use English to write compositions.					
15	I often feel panic when I write English compositions under time constraint.					
17	I'm afraid that the other students would deride my English composition if they read it.					
18	I freeze up when unexpectedly asked to write English compositions.					
19	I would do my best to excuse myself if asked to write English compositions.					
21	I don't worry at all about what other people would think of my English compositions. (R)					
22	I usually seek every possible chance to write English compositions outside of class. (R)					
23	I usually feel my whole body rigid and tense when I write English compositions.					
24	I'm afraid of my English composition being chosen as a sample for discussion in class					
26	I'm not afraid at all that my English compositions would be rated as very poor. (R)					
27	Whenever possible, I would use English to write compositions. (R)					

Questionnaire – Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory (CWAI) (Younas, M, et al., 2014)

STATEMENT	SA	A	N	D	SD
When writing in English, I:					
1. feel fear if my compositions would get lecturer's negative comments and evaluations;					
2. feel anxious due to insufficient writing practice in English;					
3. feel anxious due to insufficient writing techniques in English;					
4. feel anxious due to the problem with the topic given					
5. feel anxious due to linguistic difficulties, such as lack of mastery of grammar, diction, and vocabulary;					
6. feel anxious due to the pressure of writing English composition perfectly;					
7. feel anxious due to time pressure;					
8. feel anxious due to lack of self confidence when I write English compositions;					
9. feel anxious because I have to write the compositions in English when exams, such as quiz, middle exam and final exam;					
10. feel anxious due to a lot of assignment had to write in English.					