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Title

Prospective Teachers and L2 Writing Anxiety

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Abstract

There has been considerable research which documents the prevalence of writing anxiety in student populations in L1 and L2 settings, and explores the effects of teachers' writing anxiety on their teaching practices in L1 settings. The present study discusses the relevant issue from the perspective of prospective teachers. 85 Turkish prospective teachers (PTs) of English participated in this study. Data were collected by means of the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) (Cheng, 2004) and an open-ended questionnaire. Results of the SLWAI showed that more than half of the participating PTs had high or average writing anxiety. PTs' responses to the open-ended questionnaire indicated that those with high and average anxiety had difficulties in organizing their thoughts and producing ideas while writing in L2. In addition, PTs cited university instructors and their past L2 writing experiences as the major factors affecting their attitudes towards L2 writing, and discussed the psychological and physiological reactions they had during the writing process. Finally, the responses of the PTs revealed that their writing experiences may affect their future teaching practices.

Introduction

Anxiety, among other affective variables, has stimulated particular interest in the field of language acquisition and learning over the last several decades. One of the major reasons for concern, particularly among educators and administrators, is its potential negative effects on academic achievement (Gardner, 1985; Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; MacIntyre, Noels, & Clement, 1997). As such, research into the nature of foreign language (FL) anxiety seems to hold great promise for improving language learning in the classroom.

Although most discussions of FL anxiety have centered on the difficulties caused by anxiety with respect to activities such as speaking and listening, suggesting that oral classroom activities are most problematic and anxiety-provoking for foreign language learners (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Steinberg & Horwitz, 1986; Mejias, Applbaum, Applbaum, Trotter, 1991; Price, 1991; MacIntyre, Noels, & Clement, 1997), recent studies have provided validation for regarding writing anxiety as a specific type of anxiety, unique to the language-particular skill of writing (Bugoon & Hale, 1983; Daly &

Wilson, 1983; Blinc, Lowe, Meixner, Nouri, Pearce, 2001). According to Thompson (1980) writing anxiety is a 'fear of the writing process that outweighs the projected gain from the ability to write' (p.121). Tsui (1996), further believes that learning to write in the foreign language involves as much anxiety as learning the other skills, because writing is predominantly product-oriented, and it requires individual work, i.e., students are deprived of help, support and encouragement. As a result, learners suffer a 'distress associated with writing' and develop 'a profound distaste for the process' (Madigan, Linton, Johnson, 1996, p. 295).

Because writing anxiety research has been mostly restricted to school context, studies on the effects of writing anxiety on decisions and perceptions about writing have been mainly concerned with student populations. In contrast to the abundance of studies on L1 writing anxiety, research on L2 writing anxiety has been quite scant, and have revealed mixed and confusing results regarding the relationship of L2 writing anxiety to L2 writing performance (Hadaway, 1987; Wu, 1992), concern for content (Masny & Foxall, 1992), interest in taking more advanced L2 writing courses (Masny & Foxall, 1992), and to perceived L2 writing demands in one's major (Gungle & Taylor, 1989).

As research has demonstrated the important role teachers play in cultivating students' notions about and attitudes toward writing (Palmquist & Young, 1992), a number of studies have explored how teachers' writing anxiety influences their teaching practices, again in L1 settings. For example, Claypool's (1980) study assessed how secondary school teachers' writing anxiety was related to the frequency with which they assigned writing tasks. She reported a significant negative correlation between teachers' writing anxiety and the number of writing assignments they made. In another study, Gere, Schuessler and Abbott (1984) investigated how teachers' writing anxiety was correlated with what they considered important and relevant about writing and writing instruction. The results of the study indicated that teachers with high writing anxiety were more rigid than the low anxious ones about style and self-expression. Moreover, a significant negative correlation was found between teachers' writing anxiety and their use of a variety of instructional techniques in the teaching of composition writing. Finally, Daly and his colleagues conducted two studies investigating the relationship between teachers' writing anxiety and their classroom practices (Daly, Vangelisti, & Witte, 1988). The results of these two studies revealed that teachers' writing anxiety affected the way they evaluated students' written products. Compared to teachers with high anxiety, low anxious teachers appeared to be less bound by rigid rules, to emphasize creative expression and effort more, and to worry less about mechanical structure. Teachers' writing anxiety was found to be negatively related to their use of exercises and activities that demanded writing.

To our best knowledge, there have not been any studies on the writing anxiety of in-service or prospective ESL/EFL teachers. Thus, the present study aimed to fill in this gap in the literature as it examined the extent of writing anxiety experienced by Turkish PTs of EFL. The study also focused on the ideas and experiences of the PTs related to writing anxiety. The major reason for choosing PTs as the target group was that learning their writing anxiety level and their perspectives on this issue seemed to have important implications for teacher education programs as well as for their own teaching careers.

Before discussing the methodology and results of the study, a very brief discussion about the role of L2 writing in Turkey will be presented.

The role of writing in English in Turkey

English language teaching in Turkey has expanded rapidly in the last years due to the instrumental power of English as the international language and due to the fact that Turkey is facing European integration.

The passing of a law in 1997 that introduced a new eight-year compulsory education

system brought significant changes to foreign language education. Under this new law it became obligatory for public primary school students to start studying a foreign language from the 4th grade on. Before this date, English instruction was provided only in private schools. Today English education is offered from kindergarten level until university, either as a compulsory foreign language or as the means of instruction, e.g., there are many secondary schools and universities with a one-year preparatory class followed by English-medium instruction. In addition to the private English courses, the government encourages citizens of all ages to become proficient in English by expanding educational opportunities, such as free English courses organized by the municipalities.

For most Turkish people a high competence in oral and written English is a cornerstone to integration in the EU and as a means for both individual and national advancement, e.g., claiming higher status and gaining economic advantage.

Regarding the role of writing in English, we can say that it is highly limited in public primary and secondary schools. Students are generally asked to write guided and/or controlled paragraphs and/or short essays occasionally. The focus in writing classes is on the form of the written product rather than on how the learner should approach the process of writing. Paragraphs and essays are written in one draft and grammatical and punctual errors are corrected by the teacher. In general, students are asked to write on topics using the structures given in a relevant unit.

Yet, upon reaching the tertiary level, they face the challenge of writing in English, as they are expected to 'write well-organized papers' to pass the prep classes and/or to pursue their academic work in many universities. Thus, students who do not write in English risk becoming marginalized, as a high degree of written competence in English is generally a prerequisite at the undergraduate and graduate programs.

Method

Participants

A total of 85 PTs enrolled at the English Language Teaching Department of a highly competitive state university in Istanbul, Turkey, participated in this study. They were all fourth year students with an average age of 21.34 (SD =0.62) and had all studied English in primary and/or secondary school as a compulsory foreign language for 4-6 years before starting their undergraduate studies. The participating PTs were all native speakers of Turkish and none of them had stayed in English speaking countries more than a week. In order to enter the four-year degree program they either scored higher than 550 on the TOEFL exam or passed the proficiency exam prepared by the testing office of the university. Thus, they could be considered to have a high level of English proficiency. At the time of the study, there were 196 PTs in four classes and PTs for this study were selected randomly.

The university where the study took place is both an English and Turkish medium university. In the four-year English Language Teaching program the basic skills courses, e.g., Reading, Writing, Grammar and Speaking, and method courses, e.g., Approaches and Methods, Second Language Acquisition, are given in English throughout the four years. Students take Writing I and Writing II courses in the first and second semesters of the first year respectively, and Advanced Writing Skills course in the second year. The writing courses in the first year require students to write well-developed paragraphs and different essay types on different topics. The second year Advanced Writing course is an integration of reading articles on different topics of language learning and teaching, and practicing basic academic writing skills, such as summarizing, writing a response paper. In addition, in the third year students take a course on teaching writing to adult learners and young learners separately along with courses on teaching other skills in English. Most of the courses throughout the program require students to carry out written project work in English.

Materials

Two instruments were used in this study: the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) (Appendix A) (Cheng, 2004) and an open-ended questionnaire with six questions. The SLWAI measures the degree to which an individual feels anxious when writing in an L2 and contains 22-items all of which are answered on a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. SLWAI has good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha coefficient reported of .91. (Cheng, 2004). The Cronbach alpha for the present study was .84.

In many studies on second language writing anxiety (Hadaway, 1987; Wu, 1992; Lee, 2001) the Daly–Miller Writing Apprehension Test (WAT; Daly & Miller, 1975) and McKain's Writing Anxiety Questionnaire (WAQ; 1991) were used as the measurement instruments of second language writing anxiety. However, their effectiveness in measuring L2 writing anxiety has been questioned by a number of researchers (Shaver, 1990; Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999; Cheng, 2004) as they were both developed with reference to first language learners. The scale items used in SLWAI, on the other hand, were developed based on learners' reports of L2 writing anxiety experiences as well as with reference to other relevant anxiety scales.

The open-ended questionnaire was used to triangulate the data collected by the inventory and to gather in-depth information about the PTs' L2 writing anxiety experiences (Appendix B). PTs were told to give more than one answer to each question if they felt it was necessary. This data allowed the researchers to capture the PTs' own voices and to examine their perspectives in an attempt to understand the phenomenon. To be specific, the participants were asked to 1) describe the difficulties they faced when writing in English, 2) specify the situations and people in their own settings that may cause writing anxiety, 3) specify the psychological and physiological reactions associated with their writing anxiety, 4) explain whether they shared their writing anxiety with anyone, and 5) specify the effects of their writing experiences on their future teaching practices.

Data Analysis

For the purposes of the study, data collected from the above mentioned sources were analyzed by means of a combination of qualitative and quantitative strategies. Lynch (1996) calls this combination a mixed study design and claims that it provided the most thorough information possible as data is validated by means of triangulation.

The SLWAI was analyzed by summing the subjects' ratings of the 22-items. When statements of the SLWAI were negatively worded, responses were reversed and recorded, so that in all instances, a high score represented high anxiety. Data collected from the open-ended questionnaires were analyzed by means of pattern coding as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Procedure

The study took place in the second term of the 2004-5 academic year. In the first term of the year, the SLWAI and the questionnaire were piloted with a group of 23 PTs. Based on the results, two questions in the questionnaire were modified.

Results

Results of the inventory: Based on their scores on the SLWAI, subjects were divided into three groups. PTs whose mean scores were one or more standard deviations below the mean were judged to be low-anxious (LA), i.e., equal to or smaller than 58 (19 %); those whose mean scores were one or more standard deviations above the mean were judged to be high-anxious (HA), i.e., equal or higher than 83 (32 %). The rest were considered to have average writing anxiety (AA) (49 %). This was an interesting result considering the high level of English of the participants. A closer look at the results showed that students both HA and AA groups showed highest anxiety in statements

related to aroused physiological arousal, called somatic anxiety by Cheng (2004). The statements which received the highest score from both groups were questions 6 and 11. The former one is about learner's mind going blank and the latter one is on the learner's thoughts becoming jumbled when writing English compositions. This result was also supported by the qualitative data discussed below. Table 1 presents the distribution of the PTs according to their scores.

Table 1: Numbers and Percentages of PTs in Three Anxiety Categories

Anxiety Category	Male	Female	Total	Percent*
High anxiety	9	18	27	32
Average anxiety	12	30	42	49
Low anxiety	6	10	16	19

*rounded off to nearest number

Results of the questionnaire: The first question aimed at finding out the difficulties faced by the PTs while writing in L2. Descriptive statistics presented in Table 2 show that there are differences among the three groups in terms of the perceived difficulties during the L2 writing process, yet, inability to organize their thoughts and to produce any ideas were considered as the major difficulties by the PTs in all categories.

Table 2: Perceived Difficulties during the Writing Process

	HA	AA	LA
Inability to organize one's thoughts	19	11	3
Inability to produce any ideas	16	5	2
Poor L2 vocabulary knowledge	9	4	-
Poor L2 grammar knowledge	6	4	-
Thinking in L1	5	2	-

In the second question PTs were asked to name the situations and/or people that may cause writing anxiety. As can be seen in Table 3, anxiety generated by teachers and by PTs' past writing experiences in L1 and/or L2 have received the highest scores from the PTs with HA and AA.

Table 3: Factors Generating Anxiety

	HA	AA	LA
Teachers	17	8	-
Past experiences	13	5	-
Time limit/due date	9	3	2
Exams	7	3	1
Classroom setting	6	3	-
Peer effect	5	3	-
Topic	4	1	-

The following statements illustrate PTs' ideas related to the factors generating writing anxiety:

-When the teacher walks around the class and checks what I am writing I feel very nervous.

-Teachers generally assume that we know how to write well in English... in fact I did not have any writing classes before I came here.

-Writing for me was only copying things from books.. and now I'm expected to discuss my own ideas. It's so difficult for me. I always question my ideas about the topic. Are they too simple? What will the teacher think when she reads my paper?

-I wish the teacher helped us individually with writing. I feel that I can't show my knowledge the way I want to.

-When I have to write in a crowded, noisy classroom in a limited time I feel anxious and cannot write.

-During the exams I feel very nervous and nothing comes to my mind.

-If my friends finish their writing before I do and leave the class, I panic.

-If I have to write on a topic I do not like, writing turns into a nightmare.

The third question aimed to find out the emotions of PTs when faced with a writing task. The majority of the PTs in the HA and AA categories indicated that they felt nervous while writing in English (23 HA, 28 AA, 2 LA). The majority cited the following two reasons: fear of getting low marks (15 HA, 16 AA, 2 LA) and inability to concentrate (8 HA, 12 AA). There was another group of PTs (11 HA, 10 AA, 3 LA) who indicated that they felt 'unhappy' because they had to do a task they did not like but felt it was necessary to do. On the other hand, five PTs with LA and one PT with AA stated that they did not have any feelings that were generated by writing anxiety. The following responses of the PTs illustrate their emotions:

-Writing makes me feel nervous, because I know that I'll get a low mark. Before starting the university, I did not have any 'real' writing class.

-I get so nervous before I start writing, that I cannot concentrate. I start looking at my watch, I panic and things go on like this.

The fourth question investigated whether the PTs had any physical symptoms of anxiety while writing in L2.

Table 4: Physical symptoms of writing anxiety

	HA	AA	LA
Perspiring	7	4	2
Blushing	5	3	-
Trembling	5	3	-
Foot tapping	4	2	-
Rapid heart rate	4	3	-
Stomachache	1	3	-
Headache	3	4	-
Nothing	5	12	14

In the fifth question, 20 PTs with HA, 17 PTs with AA and 3 PTs with LA indicated they shared their thoughts and feelings about writing only with their classmates because they felt relieved this way and they wanted to learn how their friends coped with this problem. The following statement illustrates their points:

-I talked to my friends how I felt while writing the research paper and realized that I was not the only one who had all these 'weird' symptoms when starting to write. I really felt relieved.

Most of the PTs further indicated that it was the first time they had such a 'detailed' talk on their writing attitudes with anyone but their friends. They seemed to benefit from this reflective practice as indicated in the following statements:

-I have never been asked what I felt about writing before. I think we should carry out interviews like these with our students too. It helps the student to see where the problem lies and may encourage him to collaborate with his teachers to overcome it

In the last question PTs were asked to discuss how their writing experiences would affect their teaching practices in the future. The following statements illustrate their ideas:

-I don't like writing. Whether it's in Turkish or in English, doesn't matter. I have taken many courses on writing and teaching writing, yet, I have doubts about myself. How will I teach writing in class and make my students like it?

-I believe that writing in English should begin as early as possible. And it shouldn't be the typical boring things, like summarizing a book or writing the same paragraph three times. Students should be encouraged to express their ideas freely and teachers should appreciate their writings.

-I didn't do much writing when I was a student at the primary and secondary school. There was a writing section at the end of every unit of the coursebook but the teacher either skipped it or gave it as homework and nobody did it. So the writing classes have always been a nightmare for me. As a prospective teacher I don't want my students to be in the same situation. Although I don't like writing much, I know that we all need it. I believe that it is necessary to show the students how to organize their thoughts (this is my major problem). I will also make them read before writing on a specific topic because knowledge on a topic helps you a lot.

-While answering the questions in this questionnaire, I realized that I can use a similar one with my own students in the future. After finding out their anxiety level, I think a good way would be to have individual conferences with the ones with high anxiety.

To summarize, the results of the study indicated that 32% of the participating PTs had high writing anxiety and 49 % had average writing anxiety. The PTs indicated inability to organize their thoughts and to produce ideas as the major difficulties they had during the L2 writing process. According to the PTs, teachers and their past L2 writing experiences have an effect on their writing anxiety. PTs with high anxiety reported to suffer from nervousness caused by fear of getting low marks and lack of concentration along with a number of other physical symptoms. PTs with high anxiety also indicated that they felt relieved when they shared their anxiety with their friends. Finally, PTs, considering their own writing experiences, emphasized the role of teachers in making writing a positive experience in learners' education.

Discussion and Implications

The present study aimed to find out the level of writing anxiety of Turkish prospective teachers of English. The participants' beliefs, experiences, and feelings on L2 writing were also focused on in order to generate an enlightening narration of their perspectives on foreign language writing anxiety.

The results of the study have shown that the majority of the participating prospective teachers of English had high and average anxiety. MacIntyre and Gardner's theory (1989) concerning the development of language anxiety seems to be relevant here. The researchers maintained that language anxiety levels would be the highest at the early stage of language learning and then decline as learners reach higher levels of English.

Their theory is supported by many studies in the field e.g., (Chapelle & Roberts, 1986; Gardner, Smythe, & Bruner, 1977; Yan, 1998). However, evidence to the contrary was found in the present study. Although the focus of the present study was not on the development of the anxiety level, many PTs with high L2 competence had high writing anxiety and seemed uncertain of their ability to organize their thoughts effectively and to produce relevant ideas, thereby suffering high anxiety. This result may indicate that proficiency might not be the only factor that determines the level of anxiety. In fact, only a small number of PTs indicated 'poor L2 vocabulary and grammar knowledge' as difficulties faced during the L2 writing process.

A review of literature has shown that sources of anxiety are closely intertwined, creating a difficulty in teasing out a discrete factor or source. In the present study, PTs reported the pedagogical practices of their teachers and their own past writing experiences as the major sources of their L2 writing anxiety among many other sources. Teacher-generated anxiety was also documented by Price (1991) who reported significant teacher-generated anxiety and by Young (1992) who examined instructor-learner interactions.

Both qualitative and quantitative data showed that many PTs suffered from physiological arousal when writing in English. That is, many indicated that their minds went blank when facing the essay writing task in English or that they had difficulties to organize their thoughts when writing in English. These results should be shared with PTs, and reasons and solutions should be discussed together. As prospective teachers, the participants should be made aware of the results as their future students may face the same problems or difficulties when doing the writing tasks. One solution can be spending more time on pre-writing tasks, such as free-writing, outlining or discussion, regularly.

The physical manifestations of writing anxiety mentioned by the PTs were very similar to those reported in other studies, e.g., blushing, perspiring (Wörde, 2003). Another finding of the study was that the majority of the PTs with high anxiety preferred sharing their feelings with their peers to get support and to feel relieved. The fact that the PTs chose their peers and not their teachers may be considered as a cultural issue, i.e., teacher authority in teacher-student relationships in the Turkey.

Based on the results of the studies investigating the effects of teachers' writing anxiety on their teaching practices in L1 English contexts, we may assume that prospective teacher writing anxiety similarly would affect their ways of teaching writing negatively in the EFL settings. Thus, the study has a number of implications for English language education in general as well as for teacher education programs. Regarding the former issue, writing in English should not be limited to controlled exercises in the primary and secondary education as production-based writing at the university level seems to cause anxiety in students who are not used to this kind of writing. That is, students should be encouraged to express their ideas and knowledge in writing from the early stages of education on. If L2 writing is to be a pleasant experience, it seems crucial to establish a learning environment where students can write in their L2 without embarrassment, where every student writer's contribution is adequately valued and where self-confidence is built up. To this end, instructors need to offer more encouragement and positive feedback, and allow experimentation without evaluation.

To carry out these changes in the elementary and secondary schools, the importance of writing, particularly process writing, should be emphasized in the Turkish national curriculum and the time allocated to writing should be increased. Yet, Turkish teachers may show resistance against such a change, especially against following the steps of process writing, because of several reasons, e.g., their heavy workload, large sized classes and their beliefs in traditional methodology. To achieve this aim, the Ministry can provide the teachers with in-service programs in which they are informed about the importance of writing for the future studies and careers of the learners as well as about

research results regarding learners' writing anxiety and ways to overcome it. For example, teachers can be encouraged to incorporate peer feedback in their writing classes. Relevant research has claimed that social dimension of peer feedback enhances the participants' attitudes towards writing, has an impact on affect, increasing motivation through personal responsibility, greater variety, and interest (Topping, 2000; Rollinson, 2005). Peer feedback has also been considered to lead to a reduction in writer apprehension and an increase in writer confidence (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996).

Regarding the teacher education programs, prospective teachers should be provided with the opportunity to reflect on their feelings and attitudes towards learning and teaching different skills. This knowledge would enable the instructors to design the content of the methodology courses accordingly. Moreover, focus-group discussions may help the PTs realize that there are others who share the same fears and feelings of discomfort and they may share their coping strategies with each other and with their instructors.

Given the importance of anxiety on a student's performance and future career, future research might well investigate prospective teacher anxiety in relation to different skills, e.g., teaching and learning of reading, speaking and listening. Qualitative research that examines the underlying reasons seems to have highly significant implications for teacher education programs and for education in general. Studies regarding the level of writing anxiety of Turkish students at different levels along with the development of their writing proficiencies as well as experimental studies assessing the impact of different types of treatment on the writing anxiety of learners seem to be of utmost importance.

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Appendix A:

Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (developed by Cheng, 2004)

Read the statements below very carefully. For each statement, among the choices 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 circle the most suitable one for you. As the findings of this test are going to be used in for research, we kindly request you be honest while answering the questions.

1. I strongly disagree
2. I disagree
3. I have no strong feelings either way
4. I agree
5. I strongly agree

1. While writing in English, I am not nervous at all.

1 2 3 4 5

2. I feel my heart pounding when I write English compositions under time constraint.
1 2 3 4 5
3. While writing English compositions, I feel worried and uneasy if I know they will be evaluated.
1 2 3 4 5
4. I often choose to write down my thoughts in English.
1 2 3 4 5
5. I usually do my best to avoid writing English compositions.
1 2 3 4 5
6. My mind often goes blank when I start to work on an English composition.
1 2 3 4 5
7. I don't worry that my English compositions are a lot worse than others.
1 2 3 4 5
8. I tremble or perspire when I write English compositions under time pressure.
1 2 3 4 5
9. If my English composition is to be evaluated, I would worry about getting a very poor grade.
1 2 3 4 5
10. I do my best to avoid situations in which I have to write in English.
1 2 3 4 5
11. My thoughts become jumbled when I write English compositions under time constraint.
1 2 3 4 5
12. Unless I have no choice, I would not use English to write compositions.
1 2 3 4 5
13. I often feel panic when I write English compositions under time constraint.
1 2 3 4 5
14. I am afraid that the other students would deride my English composition if they read it.
1 2 3 4 5
15. I freeze up when unexpectedly asked to write English compositions.
1 2 3 4 5
16. I would do my best to excuse myself if asked to write English compositions.
1 2 3 4 5
17. I don't worry at all about what other people would think of my English compositions.
1 2 3 4 5
18. I usually seek every possible chance to write English compositions outside of class.
1 2 3 4 5
19. I usually feel my whole body rigid and tense when write English compositions.
1 2 3 4 5
20. I am afraid of my English composition being chosen as a sample for discussion in class.
1 2 3 4 5
21. I am not afraid at all that my English compositions would be rated as very poor.
1 2 3 4 5
22. Whenever possible, I would use English to write compositions.
1 2 3 4 5

Appendix B: Open-ended questionnaire

1. Do you experience any difficulties while writing in L2? If yes, what are they?
2. Name the situations and people connected with your writing anxiety.
3. What kind of physical changes occur while you are writing in L2?
4. How do you feel when writing in L2?
5. Have you shared your experience of writing anxiety with anyone?
6. How do you think your attitudes towards L2 writing will affect your future teaching practices?