

## THE CORRELATION BETWEEN STUDENTS' GRAMMAR ANXIETY AND THEIR WRITING PERFORMANCE

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### Abstract

Grammar anxiety is a common emotional barrier among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, especially in writing tasks. Writing in English demands not only vocabulary and ideas but also accurate grammar, which may provoke anxiety and impact performance. This study investigates the correlation between grammar anxiety and students' academic writing performance. The research addresses the question: "Is there a significant correlation between students' grammar anxiety and their writing performance?". A quantitative correlational design was used, involving 32 fourth-semester EFL students from the English Language Education Department at a private university in Malang. Total sampling was applied, targeting those who had completed grammar and writing-related courses. Two instruments were utilized: the Grammar Anxiety Scale (GAS) with 25 validated items, and an academic essay assessed using an analytical scoring rubric adapted from Brown and Bailey (1984), covering organization, content, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics and normality tests preceded Pearson's product-moment correlation. Results showed no significant correlation between grammar anxiety and writing performance ( $r = -0.001$ ,  $p = 0.996$ ). These findings suggest that grammar anxiety may not significantly influence writing performance in this context. Other factors such as motivation, feedback, writing strategies, and experience might play a larger role. This study enhances the understanding of affective variables in EFL writing and offers practical implications for educators to support students through broader pedagogical strategies beyond solely addressing anxiety.

**Keywords:** grammar anxiety; writing performance; EFL learners; academic writing; correlation

### INTRODUCTION

Writing is a fundamental skill that plays a critical role in students' academic success, enabling them to articulate ideas, develop arguments, and communicate effectively. The writing process varies, involving stages such as planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Murray, 1972; Flower & Hayes, 1981). Among the various elements that constitute effective writing, grammar plays a central role by contributing to clarity, coherence, and correctness (Hudson, 2004). For learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), however, mastering grammar presents a persistent challenge due to its complexity and the lack of contextualized practice (Ajaj, 2022; Levy & Ransdell, 1995). Studies in diverse contexts, including Oman, Pakistan, Sudan, and Indonesia, highlight grammar as one of the major obstacles to students' writing performance, alongside vocabulary and idea generation (Alfaki, 2015; Al Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014).

Several pedagogical solutions have been explored to address these challenges. One approach emphasizes integrating grammar instruction into writing activities rather than teaching it in isolation (Celikpazu & Tasdemir, 2022). In recent years, technology-enhanced tools such as Grammarly have

also been recognized for their role in improving grammatical accuracy and reducing writing-related stress (Aljuaid, 2024; Dizon & Gold, 2023). These AI-powered platforms offer immediate corrective feedback, which has been shown to boost students' confidence and autonomy.

Despite these developments, a growing body of research identifies grammar anxiety as a significant affective barrier that hinders students' writing performance. Grammar anxiety, defined as the fear or apprehension about using grammatical structures correctly, can impair concentration, reduce confidence, and ultimately diminish writing quality (Horwitz et al., 1986; Celikpazu & Tasdemir, 2022). While previous studies have explored the general influence of anxiety on language learning, few have directly examined the specific correlation between grammar anxiety and students' writing outcomes. Most existing literature focuses either on grammar competence or general writing anxiety, leaving a gap in understanding how grammar-related anxiety impacts writing performance.

To address this gap, this study investigates the relationship between students' grammar anxiety and their writing performance. By exploring this connection, the study aims to provide empirical insight into an under-researched area, offering practical implications for EFL instruction. The novelty of this research lies in its focused analysis of grammar anxiety as a distinct construct affecting writing skills, particularly in the context of Indonesian university students enrolled in English education programs. Unlike previous studies, which often overlook the emotional dimension of grammar in writing, this research contributes to a more holistic understanding of the affective factors influencing EFL learners' writing proficiency.

The objective of this study is to determine whether there is a significant correlation between students' grammar anxiety and their writing performance.

## **METHOD**

### ***Research Design***

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to investigate the relationship between students' grammar anxiety and their writing performance. The correlational approach was chosen to examine the degree of association between the two variables: grammar anxiety as the independent variable and writing performance as the dependent variable. This design allows for statistical analysis to determine whether variations in students' anxiety levels are significantly related to their academic writing outcomes.

### ***Population and Sample***

The participants of the study were 32 fourth-semester students from the English Education Department at a private university in Malang, Indonesia. These students were selected using total sampling, as the entire population was small and met the inclusion criteria. All participants had completed prior grammar and writing courses, making them suitable for assessing the correlation between grammar anxiety and writing performance. The sample included both male and female students, averaging 19–20 years of age, with diverse proficiency levels based on their academic records.

### ***Instruments***

Two instruments were used to collect data: the Grammar Anxiety Questionnaire (GAS) and a Writing Performance Test. The GAS was adapted from previous validated instruments (Çelikpazu

& Taşdemir, 2022; Ananda et al., 2024), consisting initially of 48 items, which were reduced to 25 valid and reliable statements after expert validation and pilot testing. The final questionnaire achieved a high reliability score (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.927). Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale and categorized into low, moderate, and high levels of grammar anxiety.

The Writing Performance Test required students to write an essay of 500–750 words on the topic “*University Environment*” within 60 minutes. The essays were assessed based on five criteria: organization, logical development, grammar, mechanics, and style, each weighted equally at 20 points, with a total maximum score of 100. The rubric was adapted from Brown and Bailey's (1984) analytic scale. To ensure objectivity, two experienced raters independently scored the essays, and inter-rater reliability was calculated using the Pearson Product-Moment formula.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection was carried out in coordination with subject lecturers during class hours. Participants first completed the Grammar Anxiety Questionnaire via Google Forms, with the link distributed through WhatsApp. The researcher provided clear instructions prior to distribution to ensure accurate responses. After completing the questionnaire, participants were instructed to write the essay by hand on the provided sheets. The writing task was conducted under controlled conditions, with the researcher monitoring and explaining the instructions before the test began.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values) were used to summarize grammar anxiety and writing performance scores. The relationship between the two variables was examined using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation to determine the strength and direction of their association. The correlation was interpreted based on the classification guidelines from Schober et al. (2018), and significance was determined at the 0.05 level. This analytical approach ensured accurate testing of the study's hypothesis regarding the influence of grammar anxiety on writing performance.

## **FINDINGS**

This study explored the correlation between students' grammar anxiety and their writing performance. Data were collected from 32 fourth-semester students through a grammar anxiety questionnaire and a timed academic writing test. Descriptive analysis revealed that the average grammar anxiety score was classified as low, while the mean writing performance score was within the excellent category.

Descriptive statistics provided an overview of the two main variables. The grammar anxiety scores ranged from 37 to 85, with a mean of 59.59 and a standard deviation of 10.82. According to the predetermined scale, this average falls into the low anxiety category. Meanwhile, the writing performance scores ranged from 68 to 97, with a mean of 84.22 and a standard deviation of 7.43. Based on the university's grading standard, this average is classified as Grade A (excellent performance).

**Table of the Descriptive Statistics of Grammar Anxiety and Writing Performance Scores**

|                            | N  | Range | Minimum | Maximum | Mean  | Std. Deviation |
|----------------------------|----|-------|---------|---------|-------|----------------|
| <b>Grammar_Anxiety</b>     | 32 | 48    | 37      | 85      | 59.59 | 10.818         |
| <b>Writing_Performance</b> | 32 | 29    | 68      | 97      | 84.22 | 7.426          |

Valid N (listwise) 32

To ensure the data met the assumptions for parametric testing, a Shapiro-Wilk normality test was conducted. The results indicated that both variables were normally distributed, with significance values of 0.886 for grammar anxiety and 0.387 for writing performance. These values are both above the 0.05 threshold, allowing for the use of Pearson Product-Moment Correlation in the next stage of analysis.

**Table of the Results of the Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test of Grammar Anxiety and Writing Performance Scores**

| Variable            | Statistic | df | Sig. (p-value) |
|---------------------|-----------|----|----------------|
| Grammar Anxiety     | 0.983     | 32 | 0.886          |
| Writing Performance | 0.966     | 32 | 0.387          |

The Pearson correlation test was used to examine the relationship between grammar anxiety and writing performance. The analysis produced a correlation coefficient (r) of -0.001 with a significance value (p) of 0.996. The near-zero correlation coefficient suggests almost no linear relationship between the two variables, and the high p-value (above 0.05) indicates that this relationship is not statistically significant.

**Table of the Pearson Correlation Between Grammar Anxiety and Writing Performance**

|                     |                     | Grammar Anxiety | Writing Performance |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Grammar Anxiety     | Pearson Correlation | 1               | -.001               |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                 | .996                |
|                     | N                   | 32              | 32                  |
| Writing Performance | Pearson Correlation | -.001           | 1                   |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .996            |                     |
|                     | N                   | 32              | 32                  |

These findings indicate that while students reported varying levels of grammar anxiety and demonstrated generally high writing performance, no clear statistical association was found between the two variables based on this sample.

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine whether grammar anxiety significantly affects students' writing performance. The results showed no significant correlation between the two variables, indicating that grammar anxiety did not statistically influence students' writing scores. This finding aligns with the research objective and suggests that grammar-related anxiety, while present, may not be a decisive factor in determining writing outcomes among EFL learners at the university level.

The absence of a significant relationship can be interpreted in several ways. First, it may reflect the adaptive strategies students develop over time, such as greater exposure to writing tasks,

confidence from prior learning, or the use of technological tools like Grammarly that help reduce the cognitive load of grammar during writing (Dizon & Gold, 2023). These strategies could act as buffers, reducing the potential negative effects of anxiety on writing performance.

Moreover, grammar anxiety is only one component of a broader construct, second language writing anxiety, which includes cognitive, somatic, and avoidance dimensions (Cheng, 2004). Therefore, isolating grammar anxiety may overlook other affective elements that have a stronger influence on writing ability, such as overall writing apprehension, low self-efficacy, or fear of negative evaluation (Cheng, 2004; Horwitz et al., 1986). The current findings support the argument by Kurniasih et al. (2022) that anxiety alone does not predict writing success, especially in instructional environments that provide adequate scaffolding and motivation.

These findings also resonate with the work of Septiani et al. (2021), who found no significant correlation between various forms of writing anxiety and writing scores among English learners. Similarly, Kurniasih et al. (2022) reported that motivation, rather than anxiety, was the most significant affective predictor of writing performance. These studies reinforce the idea that grammar anxiety may not stand alone in determining writing achievement, and its influence is often mediated by contextual factors, such as the learning environment, instructional support, and student engagement.

On the other hand, contrasting evidence from studies like Fitrinada et al. (2018) and Kurniasih et al. (2020) highlight that high anxiety can negatively affect writing if not addressed through effective teaching strategies. Fitrinada et al. found a significant negative correlation between general writing anxiety and performance ( $r = -0.545$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), while Kurniasih et al. demonstrated that reducing anxiety through the Writing Process Approach led to improved writing scores. These differences suggest that the impact of grammar anxiety may vary depending on instructional design, learner background, and task familiarity.

From a scientific perspective, the novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on grammar anxiety as a discrete construct and its contribution to clarifying that such anxiety may not have direct predictive value in academic writing. This supports pedagogical shifts toward emphasizing learner motivation, autonomy, and authentic writing tasks over grammar-centered error correction alone (Bayat, 2014; Chuang, 2019).

Pedagogically, these findings have several implications. Teachers should not prioritize grammar instruction at the expense of fostering students' writing confidence and engagement. Instead, integrating grammar instruction within meaningful, communicative contexts, such as collaborative writing or real-life writing tasks, can encourage fluency and reduce fear of grammatical errors (Applebee, 1986; Graham & Sandmel, 2011). Furthermore, teachers may consider investing in pre-writing activities, peer feedback, and technology-assisted writing tools to create a low-anxiety learning environment (Zhang, 2019; Dizon & Gold, 2023).

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study concludes that grammar anxiety does not have a significant impact on students' writing performance. Although anxiety is often believed to hinder academic writing, grammar-related anxiety alone was not found to be a determining factor. These findings highlight the

importance of adopting a more holistic view of writing success, emphasizing the role of motivation, confidence, and strategic competence.

Teachers are encouraged to create supportive and communicative writing environments where grammar is taught within meaningful writing activities. Instruction should move beyond mere error correction and focus on boosting student motivation, engagement, and expression. Collaborative writing, process-based approaches, and contextual feedback can help build both confidence and skill. Students are advised to practice writing regularly, use pre-writing strategies, and collaborate with peers to enhance fluency and reduce stress, leading to more positive writing experiences.

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