



**JEELS**

(Journal of English Education and Linguistics Studies)

P-ISSN: 2407-2575 E-ISSN: 2503-2194

<https://jurnalfaktarbiyah.iainkediri.ac.id/index.php/jeels>

## EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR ALLEVIATING EFL STUDENTS' WRITING ANXIETY: A MIXED-METHOD STUDY

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**Abstract:** At higher education, students at the end of the study are required to write a final project. Writing English papers is challenging and might create writing anxiety. Therefore, it is necessary to look at what strategies are used by the teachers and their effect on anxiety levels and performance. Furthermore, it is also crucial to accommodate students' perceptions of the strategies so that students' voices provide valid information on how the classroom should be. This research uses a mixed-

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### <sup>1</sup>Citation in APA style:

Kurniasih, Suhartoyo, E., & Fransiskus, F. (2024). Examining the effectiveness of teaching strategies for alleviating EFL students' writing anxiety: A mixed-method study. *JEELS*, 11(1), 1-21.

DOI: 10.30762/jeels.v11i1.1464

Submission: September 2023, Revision: October-December 2023, Publication: February 2024

method methodology to analyze lecturers' anxiety-reduction strategies and students' perceptions of them. Three instruments were used to collect data, namely a Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), open-ended questions about the perception, and students' writing scores. A paired sample t-test was used to compare students' writing anxiety and performance before and after treatment. Content analysis was used to assess student opinions of the strategies. The statistics showed that students' writing anxiety fell from high (71.35) to moderate (66.47). Meanwhile, students' writing grade rises from 72.00 to 79.03. SPSS analysis showed that anxiety-reducing strategies significantly affect writing anxiety and student performance ( $p = 0.000$ ). Consequently, this study's findings should be beneficial in writing classes.

**Keywords:** *writing anxiety, anxiety-reducing strategies, EFL writing*

## INTRODUCTION

EFL students are exposed to writing activities during their studies. Writing in a foreign language is demanding and challenging (Challob et al., 2016). EFL students have to apply language aspects, such as grammar, vocabulary, and, writing mechanics to convey their message to the readers. Furthermore, students are also encouraged to understand essay organization and writing techniques. To be a proficient writer, students are required to do great effort and frequent practice. It is in agreement with Bruning and Horn (2000) that writing includes some crucial factors and adequate competence to produce good composition.

During the writing activity, students have to deal with their emotions, such as being under pressure, panicked, stressed, confused, and anxious. Moreover, when they write under time constraints it

adds more to negative feelings. On some occasions, students are also worried about getting low scores and getting negative comments from others (Jennifer & Ponniah, 2017). These emotions need to be considered in writing class. It is due to emotion is considered to be the heart of language learning (Dewalee et al., 2019). The aforementioned negative emotions that occur during writing activity are known as writing anxiety. Writing anxiety refers to the emotional state when students are instructed to produce a piece of writing (Cheng, 2002).

Some previous studies have investigated the strategies to alleviate writing anxiety. The strategies are discussion activity and outlining to generate ideas, collaborative writing, peer-review (Kurniasih et al., 2023a), writing process approach (Kurniasih et al., 2020), Process-Genre Approach include collaborative composing, planning, giving positive feedback from peers and teachers, and implementing recursive course (Ajmal et al., 2023). Young (1991) also conducts a literature review of some of the available works. Her list of elements included exam situations, teacher-student relationships, L2 learners' perspectives, and the teaching and learning process. It may be argued that unsuitable teacher-student interactions occasionally cause anxiety. Excessive correcting of errors may also increase students' anxiety. Horwitz (2017) asserts that interpersonal and personal components may have a bigger influence than other elements. Teachers should have a complete awareness of students' traits in order to advise and help them effectively.

In addition, studies also found that students' negative emotions are correlated significantly with the students' writing ability (Chuang, 2019; Jennifer & Ponniah, 2017). Numerous empirical studies have looked into how students' writing skills are impacted by writing anxiety. Kitano (2001) found that there is a significant difference in anxiety levels between first-year and senior college students. Other research conducted by Erkan and Saban (2011), Gibriel (2019), Abdel Latif (2015), and Zhang (2011) yielded similar findings, demonstrating a strong inverse relationship between students' writing anxiety and performance. Learners who felt more

anxiety were more likely to perform poorly than those who felt less anxious.

To date, research on writing anxiety have been carried out to uncover the level, types, and cause of writing anxiety. Some of the sources of anxiety are lack of self-confidence, inadequate teacher feedback, and inadequate writing practice (Cheng, 2002; Wahyuni et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). A recent study also correlates some affective factors, such as motivation, anxiety, attitude, and self-efficacy on writing performance (Kurniasih et al., 2022). The previous studies examined the effect of writing anxiety on writing performance. They found that students having high level of anxiety is found to have low writing performance (Abdel Latif, 2015; Gibriel, 2019).

Some studies have explored some strategies to alleviate writing anxiety. Wynne et al. (2014) proposed a creative group design to assist graduate students in overcoming their anxiety related to writing their dissertations. Alrabai (2014) reported teachers who show positive behaviour and enhance of students' self-esteem decrease students' anxiety. In addition, Chuang (2019) offers a list of instructional strategies that educators employ to help students feel less anxious about learning a foreign language. Strategies include giving students more time for practice and preparation, providing peer assistance through scaffolding, and providing tailored instruction to reduce anxiety in the classroom. Additionally,

A recent study has explored some teachers' strategies to reduce writing anxiety. Kurniasih et al., (2023a) has identified some teachers' strategies to alleviate students' writing anxiety. Those strategies are categorized based on the interview with writing teachers using content analysis. Some strategies to be implemented in this result will be taken from the summary in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.**

*Summary of Writing Anxiety-reducing Strategies*

No.	Causes of Anxiety	Strategies
1	Linguistics difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. allowing students to use Automated Writing Feedback tools during the writing process</li> <li>b. allocating proofreading sessions</li> <li>c. providing more resources</li> <li>d. introducing some vocabulary</li> </ul>
2	Lack of topical knowledge (esp. writing under time constraints)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. giving familiar/latest topics</li> <li>b. giving some alternative topics</li> <li>c. allowing students to choose their topics (self-selected topics)</li> <li>d. doing brainstorming activities</li> <li>e. providing enough time to complete their essay (2 days - 3 weeks)</li> <li>f. implementing collaborative writing</li> </ul>
3	Fear of negative evaluation from peers and teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. showing positive attitude</li> <li>b. motivating the students to be open-minded with any comments</li> <li>c. creating a less anxiety-provoking classroom</li> </ul>
4	Stagnant writing skills/unconfident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. doing positive self-talk</li> <li>b. reminding them that writing is a process</li> <li>c. inviting students to recall their writing journey from the early semester</li> </ul>
5	Lack of writing technique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. analyzing text models (bad and good essays)</li> <li>b. writing an outline</li> <li>c. implementing freewriting activities</li> <li>d. comparing different essays' characteristics</li> </ul>
6	Lack of writing practice inside and outside the classroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. asking students to do more writing practice</li> <li>b. asking students to write in</li> </ul>

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		English frequently (on social media
		c. training students to write more essay
7	insufficient and ineffective writing feedback	a. giving written feedback
		b. giving oral feedback
		c. implementing whole class (general) feedback
		d. implementing peer review activity
		e. informing the criteria for evaluation

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The previous study was carried out to explore the strategies using qualitative design. As the earlier investigations have not looked at how well teachers' methods for reducing students' writing anxiety work. The current study sees that it is necessary to study to what extent those aforementioned strategies reduce students' writing anxiety. Thus, this study will add empirical findings on research in the area. In addition, the opinions of students regarding the teaching methods were not taken into account in earlier research. In this study, the students are given the chance to voice their opinion after being exposed to some anxiety-reducing strategies.

Before investigating the teachers' strategies, it is necessary to investigate the condition of the student's emotional state by investigating the level of students' writing anxiety, so that teachers have information on what strategies are suitable for their students. Having been stated the background previously, the recent study aims to answer the following questions:

1. Is there any significant effect on students' level of writing anxiety taught by anxiety-reducing strategies?
2. Is there any significant effect on students' writing performance taught by anxiety-reducing strategies?
3. How do the students perceive those strategies?

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study aims at measuring the effect of writing anxiety-reducing strategies on students' anxiety levels on students' performance, and this study also focuses on investigating the students' perceptions of the strategies implemented by teachers. The research design was a mixed-method. Descriptive quantitative is used to know the level of students' anxiety and the students' performance before and after the treatment. Meanwhile, the paired sample t-test was used to measure the effect of anxiety-reducing strategies on the level of anxiety and the writing performance. Furthermore, qualitative data about the students' perceptions was obtained from students' responses to the open-ended questions. It is important to consider students' voices so the strategies match their needs and conditions.

### **Research Setting and Participant**

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of some teaching strategies on writing anxiety and performance. The strategies include outlining, written and oral corrective feedback, discussion, peer-review, self-editing and evaluation, collaborative writing, and giving free topic. Furthermore, this study also aims at exploring the students' perception of those strategies. As many as 34 undergraduate students participated in this study consisting of 24 female and 10 male students. They were informed about the purpose of this study and were asked for their agreement to participate in this study. This research was conducted at one private university in Indonesia. Utilizing cluster random sampling, the participants were taken from students who enrolled in the essay writing course. They were in the third year of the study.

## **Instruments**

There are three instruments in this study. The data on anxiety levels were collected by using Cheng's (2002) Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory. The 22 items in the questionnaire were broken down into three categories: Cognitive (1, 3, 7, 9, 14, 17, 20, 21), Somatic (2, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15, 19), and Avoidance Behavior (4, 5, 10, 12, 16, 18, 22). Prior to calculating the overall results, reverse scoring was necessary for some items (1, 4, 17, 18, and 22). The following parameters were used as classification criteria to ascertain the anxiety levels. Low anxiety is indicated by a mean that is less than fifty (Low,  $M < 50$ ). Moderate anxiety is defined as having a mean between 50 and 60 (Moderate,  $M=50-65$ ). Anxiety is high (High,  $M > 65$ ) if the mean is greater than 65). The second instrument was the writing test given in the pre-test and post-test to compare the students' performance before and after the treatment. The participants were instructed to write 5-paragraph of argumentative essay. The third instrument is open-ended questions about the student's perceptions of the strategies implemented by teachers. The participants are requested to respond to the questions about benefits and the weaknesses of each teaching strategies. The questions were delivered through various platforms, such as Mentimeter, paper-based responses, and Google form.

## **Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection procedures are conducted in various steps. First, the SLWAI questionnaire was distributed to the students before the treatment. Second, the students were given writing pretest to measure the students' initial writing ability. Third, students attended 14 sessions of writing classes. In the Essay writing course, the students were instructed to write different types of essays, such as opinion and argumentative essays. The students wrote one opinion essay. Meanwhile, they wrote two argumentative essays. The following are some strategies which are commonly applied in the writing class taken from Kurniasih (2023a).



**Table 2.**

*Anxiety Reducing Strategies in the Writing Class*

<b>Anxiety-reducing strategies</b>	<b>Activities</b>
<b>Outlining (Meeting 3)</b>	Students were given time three topics and decided their position, agree/disagree with the alternative topics including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. which will be better pursuing higher education or finding a job?</li> <li>b. human resources to be replaced by robots</li> <li>c. buying local brand vs international brand</li> </ol> The outline template was also given.
<b>Written Feedback  Meeting 4,5,9</b>	The students' work was submitted in both soft file and hard file forms. For the soft file, the feedback was given via the comment feature in Microsoft Word and google docs. Meanwhile, comments and feedback were written down directly on their paper.
<b>Oral Feedback Meeting 4,5,9</b>	Face-to-face writing conferences were done in the classroom. Students' works have been submitted in the previous meeting.
<b>Peer-review Meeting 6</b>	Students were instructed to do a blind review of their friend's essay. The name was removed from the paper, and it was changed into a code. The peer review rubric was also given to the students consisting of some points such as essay organization, ideas etc.
<b>Analyzing different types of writing Meeting 7</b>	Students analyzed three type different types of argumentative essays. It is done to help them understand better the essay organization.
<b>Discussion/debate activity about TikTok for language learning,</b>	Debate activity helps students express their ideas. The topic was The Use of

<b>then use the ideas for making an outline before writing an essay. (Meeting 8)</b>	TikTok for language learning. Students decided their position on whether they agreed/disagreed with the motion. They gather with their teammates, discuss their opinion, and started the debate activity.
<b>Collaborative Writing: Unfinished Essay Meeting 10</b>	Students worked collaboratively to write the body and concluding paragraphs. The introductory paragraph and 1 <sup>st</sup> body paragraph have been provided.
<b>Collaborative Writing: Chain Story Meeting 11</b>	Students were divided into two big teams. The first and the second person were given 1 minute to write. The third and fourth students were given 2 minutes to read their friends' sentences and add one or more sentences to the story. The Chain story games continue till the last person who got the longest time to write the ending of the story.
<b>Self-Editing and Evaluation Meeting (Meeting 12)</b>	Students understand the characteristics of a good essay. They were given the chance to review their essay using the criteria of evaluation. They scored their first draft and make some improvements and score the revised essay.
<b>Free topic (Meeting 13, 14)</b>	Students are given the freedom to find their own topics for their essays and read some sources concerning their topic.

Fourth, the SLWAI questionnaire was distributed to the students after the treatment. Fifth, the students were given a posttest to measure the students score after the treatment. Sixth, the students were given open-ended questions to obtain information on their perception of teacher's strategies after the implementation of some strategies, including collaborative writing, feedback, peer review and self-editing.

## Data Analysis

Utilizing SPSS 20 for the statistical program, the first data analysis was analyzed descriptive analysis to figure out the distribution of students' writing anxiety. Then the result was analyzed using an independent sample t-test to see whether there is a significant effect on students' level of writing anxiety and writing performance taught by anxiety-reducing strategies. Finally, the student's perceptions were analyzed using content analysis in which the students' responses was categorized under similar themes.

## FINDINGS

This study attempts to explore the effect of anxiety-reducing strategies on the level of anxiety and writing performance. Furthermore, this study also reported the students' perception of the strategies implemented by the teachers. To enact those research questions, a mixed-methods study was used.

### Impact on Students' Level of Writing Anxiety

The result of the data analysis of the SLWAI questionnaire are presented in Table 3 and Table 4.

**Table 3.**

*Paired Sample Descriptive Statistics*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Anxiety: Pre-test	71.35	34	9.270	1.590
	Anxiety: Post-test	66.47	34	11.384	1.952

The result of the data analysis of the SLWAI questionnaire show that the mean of students' anxiety level is 71.35 which is equal to a high level of anxiety. Meanwhile, the anxiety level in the post-test was 66.47 which indicates moderate anxiety. This statistical analysis proved that the students' anxiety decreases from high to moderate anxiety.

**Table 4**

*Paired Sample Test*

		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Anxiety: Pre-test & Post-test	4.882	3.112	.534	9.149	33	.000

Table 4 above projects the significant effect of writing anxiety reducing anxiety on the student's level of anxiety with the level of significant .000. This finding supports the earlier statement that the anxiety reduced from high to moderate level.

### Impact on Students' Writing Performance

Concerning the writing performance, the descriptive data are presented in Table 5 and the result of Paired sample test in Table 6.

**Table 5**

*Paired Sample Descriptive Statistics*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 2	Writing: Pre-test	72.00	34	4.786	.821
	Writing: Post-test	79.03	34	3.614	.620

Table 5 shows the students' pretest score was 72.00, and it increases in the post-test to 79.03. This proves that students' writing performance increases when their anxiety decreases.

**Table 6**

*Paired Sample Test*

		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 2	Writing: Pre-test & Post-test	-7.029	5.942	1.019	-6.899	33	.000

Table 6 shows that anxiety-reducing strategies significantly increase the student's writing performance with a significant value of .000. It can be said that the strategies implemented by the teachers have successfully created a comfortable situation in the writing class. The strategies can be seen in Table 2.

### **Students' Perception of the Implementation on Writing Anxiety-Reducing Strategies**

The findings from the open-ended questions are detailed into some emerging themes, such as generating ideas through outlining and discussion, oral and written feedback as a guide for a better writing product and understanding own weaknesses through peer-review and self-editing.

#### ***Generating ideas through outlining and collaborative writing***

Students feel secure enough to find ideas about a certain topic through group discussion initiated by debate activity, then followed up with collaborative writing.

*I enjoy the debate activity about TikTok for language learning. The class was very fun. We can express our opinion and rebut others' opinions. From the debate activity, we develop an outline before writing the full essay. It helps me to get ideas (S25).*

*Writing in pair bring positive feelings to me. Two people shared their own ideas making the writing becomes easier and more fun (S32).*

*The activity we do in pair after debate, make our opinion more varied and know other opinions that might be relevant to the topic (S4).*

The debate activity became a new activity for the students before they started writing. It could make the students

#### ***Oral and written feedback as a guide for a better writing product***

The students responded positively towards the use of integration of oral and written feedback. During the lesson, students are given the chance to consult the teacher after they receive written

feedback to clarify. The student's response can be seen in the following excerpt.

*I think so. It is useful especially for me because I'm not confident with my writing skill. So, I can evaluate my essay from the feedback (S3).*

*Yes. Not only do they point out errors in my essay, but they also gave proper corrections to said errors (S12).*

One student also related the response to the natural phenomenon that just happened when we were in the class. As stated below:

*Feedback is very useful to help me point out my mistake, so I know what to improve in my essay. Hopefully, there is no more earthquakes (S7).*

### ***Understanding own weaknesses through peer review and self-editing***

Peer review and self-editing are found to be one of the best strategies to reduce students writing anxiety. The students were given the opportunity to read their classmate's essays and gave comments on the draft following the scoring rubric. Students showed positive responses towards the peer-review activity as stated below:

*I can help to see things from many perspectives and help in one's own writing journey (S17).*

*With the blind peer review activity, I can review without knowing the writer and she/he doesn't know who is the reviewers. So, I can give an honest and fair review. At first, I felt unsure of my review, but I convince myself that it is for the good sake of my friends' work (S12).*

Some students also discuss the challenges of implementing peer-review

*We are trained to be wise person in the peer-review activity because we do not only find errors but also give suggestions (S16).*

*It challenges the brain to not only give a proper and fair review but also a review that is aimed to help the writer (S17).*

*I do not feel competent enough to give a critique of my friend's draft. I think my writing skill is not really good (S36).*

The challenges of peer-review activity dealt with their affective feelings when giving comments and feedback to their friends' drafts, such as being a wise person, being fair, and being afraid of giving improper feedback.

From the explanation, it can be said that students perceived writing anxiety-reducing strategies offered some benefits to make the writing activity become less demanding. They believed that the implemented strategies helped them to find ideas, understand what need to be improved from their writing. In addition, they can produce a better writing product.

## DISCUSSION

The students experienced a high level of anxiety as measured in the beginning of the semester. Their anxiety reduced into a moderate level after the implementation of writing anxiety-reducing strategies in the intervention phase. In addition, the students' writing score also increased from 72.00 to 79.03. The current study has proved that there is a significant effect of anxiety-reducing strategies on the level of anxiety and on the writing performance. Data from the open-ended question also indicated positive responses of the students toward the implementation of the strategy. Teachers have implemented some strategies, such as outlining, group discussion, collaborative writing, peer review and self-editing technique.

The findings of this study also conform to the previous study which found that writing an outline as part of the Writing Process Approach (WPA) reduced students' writing anxiety due to its positive effect, such as helping students to be more prepared, avoid being stuck, and being stress (Kurniasih et al., 2020). In addition, outlining is found to be an effective strategy to reduce the students' writing anxiety. Outlining activity give students the opportunity to conceptualize and organize their ideas. It will make them easier to develop their essay structurally. This finding corroborates those previous studies explaining the effectiveness of outlining on the student's performance (Li & Liu, 2019; Kurniasih et al., 2020).

Writing becomes easier when teachers allow students to get scaffolding from their peers. In this study, the teacher implemented blind-peer feedback to avoid subjectivity, as normally students are not confident enough to give comments, suggestions, and score their peer's paper if they know the writer. Previous studies reported that peer feedback provides a positive effect on the students' writing performance (Huisman et al., 2018) and students were enthusiastic and enjoying when giving feedback (Su & Huang, 2022).

During the writing activity, the students were exposed to two collaborative writing activities. The first activity was unfinished argumentative writing. The second activity was writing a chain story. The two activities provide enough time for students to work together on the task. This situation reduced their anxiety since they have friends to share with, they solve the problems together. Current study has implemented feedback with the integration of technology which showed that Wiki mediated-collaborated writing has significantly enhanced the students writing performance (Rahimi & Fathi, 2022). More benefits of collaborative strategies have been explored through the use of electronic and conventional writing portfolio. The findings showed the writing performance of both groups increased (Fathi & Rahimi, 2022)

Regarding the strategies used in the pre-writing stage, teachers have implemented debate activity to elicit some ideas before students started writing argumentative essay about the use TikTok for language learning. The students were divided into two big teams with affirmative and negative team. They expressed their ideas with the partner and the discussion was conducted. The benefit of debate activity is to help students to get valuable information from other team which later be used to write argumentative text. This technique can also be useful for their essay. This carefully designed learning instruction that also accommodates students' affective side to feel



secure in writing class have a significant influence on the students' writing skill; it is in line with the statement that debate activity could increase students' critical thinking and writing skill (Liu & Pásztor, 2022). In addition, study also showed that debate activity increases both oral and written competence (Kassem, 2021).

After discussing the findings of this study and compared with the students will certainly learn if they feel comfortable, as discussed above that students' anxiety can be alleviated with proper instruction. Understanding students' psychological state provides useful insight into the best teaching technique. students who are situated in a comfortable classroom can help students learn better, especially in writing. The findings of this study informed that writing is still challenging and demanding task to do, yet teachers can reduce students' anxiety by implementing strategies to help students write better with low anxiety. It is, therefore, important to understand the students' perception of what instruction work best for them so that the learning will be meaningful. In addition, it is also important to integrate other skills in writing class, for example speaking for debate activity, to facilitate them finding ideas and are ready to write essays.

## CONCLUSION

The present study was carried out to explore the effect of anxiety-reducing strategies on the student's level of writing anxiety and writing performance. Furthermore, the findings also uncover the students' perception of the teachers' strategies. The context of this study was carried out in a writing class with no sit in exam given to the students. All the writing assignment were completed following the writing process approach. The result of the data analysis showed that students' writing anxiety level decreases from high to moderate levels. Meanwhile, the student's writing performance increases from 72.00 to 79.03. These findings have proven that anxiety-reducing

strategies have a significant effect on the students' writing anxiety level and performance.

The findings of this study can be used a reference for teacher to teach writing, such as implementing writing process approach (outlining, feedback, peer-review, self-editing). This study also proved that writing activity can be integrated with other skills, such as speaking, in the initial staged of writing process. It is to help students gain ideas about the topics and finally reduced their anxiety due to lack of topical knowledge. However, there is still room for further research to compare the control and experimental group to see the effectiveness of the anxiety-reducing strategies on the students' performance.

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