

# A Conceptual Review on the Influence of Writing Anxiety and Writing Motivation Towards Willingness to Write Among ESL Students

Muhammad Irfan Mokhtar<sup>1\*</sup>, Noor Hanim Rahmat<sup>2</sup>, Zaemah Abdul Kadir<sup>2</sup>,  
Nur Alyani Khairol Anuar<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kampus Pasir Gudang, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup> Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia

\*Corresponding Author: [muhd.irfanm@gmail.com](mailto:muhd.irfanm@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** *For many ESL learners, writing in a second language can be quite a daunting task, especially in academic settings where clarity, structure, and confidence are essential. Even with different teaching methods, writing is still seen as the hardest language skill, frequently linked to feelings of anxiety and a lack of motivation. This conceptual paper explores how writing anxiety and writing motivation affect the willingness to write (WTW) among ESL learners, particularly focussing on engineering undergraduates. This study examines the connections between various forms of writing anxiety (somatic, cognitive, and avoidance) and motivation, utilising the theoretical frameworks of Foreign Language Anxiety and Self-Determination Theory. It also investigates how different types of motivation, both autonomous and controlled, influence WTW. Research indicates a lack of clarity regarding the influence of anxiety and motivational factors on the writing behaviours of ESL students, especially in the context of engineering students. This paper presents a conceptual framework designed to illustrate the connections between these constructs and to formulate hypotheses for future empirical studies. The model seeks to offer meaningful insights for educators as they create interventions that can help with anxiety, boost motivation, and ultimately encourage ESL learners to participate more actively in writing tasks.*

**Keywords:** Writing Anxiety, Writing Motivation, Willingness to Write, ESL

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## 1. Introduction

Effective writing abilities are crucial for individuals learning a second language (L2), as they significantly contribute to successful communication, performance in assessments, opportunities for higher education, and improved job prospects (Maniam et al., 2023). Individuals who cultivate their writing skills tend to engage in written assignments with greater assurance.

Even with the application of numerous teaching methods designed to improve writing skills, numerous ESL students still encounter ongoing challenges in understanding written materials (Mehat & Ismail, 2021). Considering that writing is acknowledged as an essential element of language learning, its advancement holds significant value. Proficiency in this skill enables

individuals to create unique written content across different genres, in accordance with educational standards.

Writing is frequently regarded by university-level learners as the most daunting and formidable of the various language skills (Rosdiana, 2019). This viewpoint highlights the complex nature of writing, which presents both cognitive and emotional challenges even for some of the most skilled authors throughout history (Khosravi et al., 2023). Hayes (1996) defines writing as a task that fundamentally entails problem-solving and imposes considerable cognitive demands on the writer.

In the context of engineering education, English language proficiency is of critical importance. A robust proficiency in English significantly improves the employability of engineering students and aids them in achieving their career aspirations (Krishnan et al., 2019, as cited in Mohamed et al., 2022). Consequently, the development of writing skills has emerged as a pivotal element in engineering programs, with English courses tailored to provide students with the essential writing abilities necessary for effective communication in both academic and professional settings (Halim et al., 2022). According to Zuki et al. (2022), engineering students continue to struggle with English writing, particularly in the area of grammar. Their limited grammatical knowledge, combined with low motivation and confidence, often leads to anxiety and apprehension toward writing in English.

Although there has been an increasing focus on reading comprehension, presentation, and technical skills, the aspect of writing, especially students' motivation to participate in it, has garnered relatively less interest in recent studies within higher education. This raises important issues, as the willingness to write serves as both an indicator of writing performance and a mirror of students' confidence, motivation, and cognitive-emotional preparedness for engaging in academic writing (Dörnyei, 2005; H. Wang & Troia, 2023).

In contrast to reading or listening, writing serves as a skill that generates output. An ability that necessitates proactive development, creativity in thought, and an openness to embrace intellectual challenges. A reluctance to engage in writing can impede students' growth in critical thinking, self-expression, and argumentation skills, which are vital for success in both academic and professional environments (Zhang, 2019).

Given these ongoing difficulties, gaining insight into the factors that influence learners' willingness to write (WTW) is vital for both students and educators. Thus, this paper aims to look in detail on the relationship between writing anxiety and writing motivation and their influence on engineering students' willingness to write.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Willingness to Write**

Writing is an essential skill that plays a crucial role in students' academic achievements and personal growth. It not only improves their capacity to connect across different fields but also creates pathways to international possibilities. Writing is a complex task that calls for strong critical thinking abilities to effectively generate, organise, and articulate ideas (Alsowat, 2022). In addition to facilitating communication, writing acts as a significant resource for learning, enabling students to enhance their comprehension and expand their knowledge across various disciplines (Tanjung & Hafizh, 2022). Formulating thoughts, putting them together into sentences and paragraphs that make sense, and making sure they are clear for the intended

audience are all mental and physical tasks that go into the process. However, for learners with limited English proficiency, especially those for whom English is a second language, these tasks can pose significant difficulties.

Kaivanpanah et al. (2019) define "Willingness to Write" (WTW) as the extent of motivation that learners exhibit when participating in writing activities in a second or foreign language. In a similar vein, Rafiee and Abbasian-Naghneh (2020) describe WTW as the preparedness and eagerness of a learner to engage in writing tasks, regardless of whether this engagement is voluntary or driven by personal interest.

## 2.2 Writing Motivation

One important factor influencing learners' continuous efforts and language learning successes is motivation. Actions, willingness, and objectives are all influenced most by motivation. These needs, wants, or desires could already exist inside a person, or they might be acquired as a result of cultural, societal, or lifestyle factors (Alhamdawe, 2022). Activity that offers learners a benefit, an incentive, or the possibility of a rewarding outcome is motivating because it elicits an emotional response (Salikin et al., 2017). When learners see a need for the information or believe it to be relevant, their motivation to study rises.

Many researchers have investigated the factors that motivate individuals in writing, examining it from multiple theoretical perspectives. This has resulted in a variety of interpretations regarding what inspires learners to engage in the writing process (De Smedt et al., 2023).

A prominent theory that seeks to clarify the concept of motivation is Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT explores deeper aspects of human motivation and personality, grounded in experimental research. It differentiates between controlled and autonomous forms of motivation within social contexts. SDT posits that motivation can be classified into different types, depending on how much self-determination individuals feel. This self-determination reflects the extent to which people consciously endorse a particular behaviour (Ratelle et al., 2007).

SDT outlines three distinct types of motivation that exist on the spectrum of self-determination: autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation. Autonomous motivation is characterised by the internal regulation and self-driven nature of engaging in activities that originate from personal value or genuine interest. On the other hand, controlled motivation stems from external influences or responsibilities, like incentives or the anxiety of facing disapproval. At the extreme end of the spectrum lies amotivation, characterised by individuals who feel no intention to act due to an unclear connection between their efforts and the resulting outcomes (Shahar et al., 2003; Ratelle et al., 2007).

De Smedt's model differentiates between autonomous and controlled forms of motivation, providing valuable insights into the factors that inspire individuals to engage in reading and writing, whether for academic purposes or leisure. Building on this framework, the current study seeks to explore how these two types of motivation influence students' willingness to engage in writing tasks. Thus, the following hypothesis are proposed:

- H1: Autonomous motivation has a significant relationship with WTW in academic writing.
- H2: Controlled motivation has a significant relationship with WTW in academic writing.

### 2.3 Writing Anxiety

The term anxiety, as defined by Gardner and MacIntyre (1993), refers to the subjective sensation of unease, concerns, and physiological reactions that a learner encounters when engaging in a language-related task, such as speaking, reading, or writing. Cassady (2022) used the phrase "academic anxiety" to include the many fears that learners commonly encounter inside educational settings.

While there are common traits and outcomes associated with anxiety, the specific type of anxiety felt by learners in different fields tends to be unique to each discipline. Writing anxiety represents a distinctive kind of anxiety.

The idea of writing anxiety was initially presented by Daly and Miller in 1975. Writing anxiety is described as the inclination of individuals to shy away from writing tasks because of the apprehension related to being evaluated during the writing process.

Thompson (1980 as cited in Başkan, 2021) describes writing anxiety as a psychological condition marked by a fear of the writing process that outweighs the expected advantages of being able to write. The experience of feeling a pervasive sense of dread, discomfort, or fear can occur at various stages during the writing process and holds importance for both personal and academic or professional contexts.

Cheng (2004) posits that L2 writing anxiety is a type of anxiety disposition that is reasonably stable and specifically linked to L2 writing. This anxiety disposition encompasses a range of dysfunctional thoughts, heightened physiological arousal, and maladaptive behaviour. Cheng also outlines three distinct types of writing anxiety. Some students face somatic anxiety, characterised by physical symptoms like nervousness, tension, or a sense of general discomfort. Some individuals experience cognitive anxiety, which is frequently sparked by external factors such as critical feedback from teachers, uncertainty regarding their writing skills, or anxiety about being judged negatively by others. A third group shows signs of behavioural anxiety, evident in avoidance behaviours like procrastination, disengagement, or hesitance to finish writing tasks.

The conceptualization of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) as a distinctive form of apprehension specific to the process of acquiring a foreign language was initially proposed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986a) view anxiety and its relation to a foreign language as situation-specific anxiety. FLA is a valuable framework in studying writing anxiety among ESL learners and its effect on their WTW. It provides both theoretical depth and practical relevance in this exploration. It is suitable for studying anxiety among engineering ESL students and their specific linguistic challenges.

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of FLA as outlined by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). It utilises Cheng's (2004) innovative Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) to delve into the detailed aspects of writing anxiety. Therefore, the suggested hypotheses are as follows:

- H3: Somatic anxiety has a significant relationship with controlled motivation
- H4: Avoidance anxiety has a significant relationship with controlled motivation
- H5: Cognitive anxiety has a significant relationship with controlled motivation

### 3. Conceptual Framework

According to the findings in the literature, figure 1 illustrates the relationship between writing motivation, writing anxiety, and students’ willingness to write. As a result, the proposed conceptual framework can be outlined as follows:

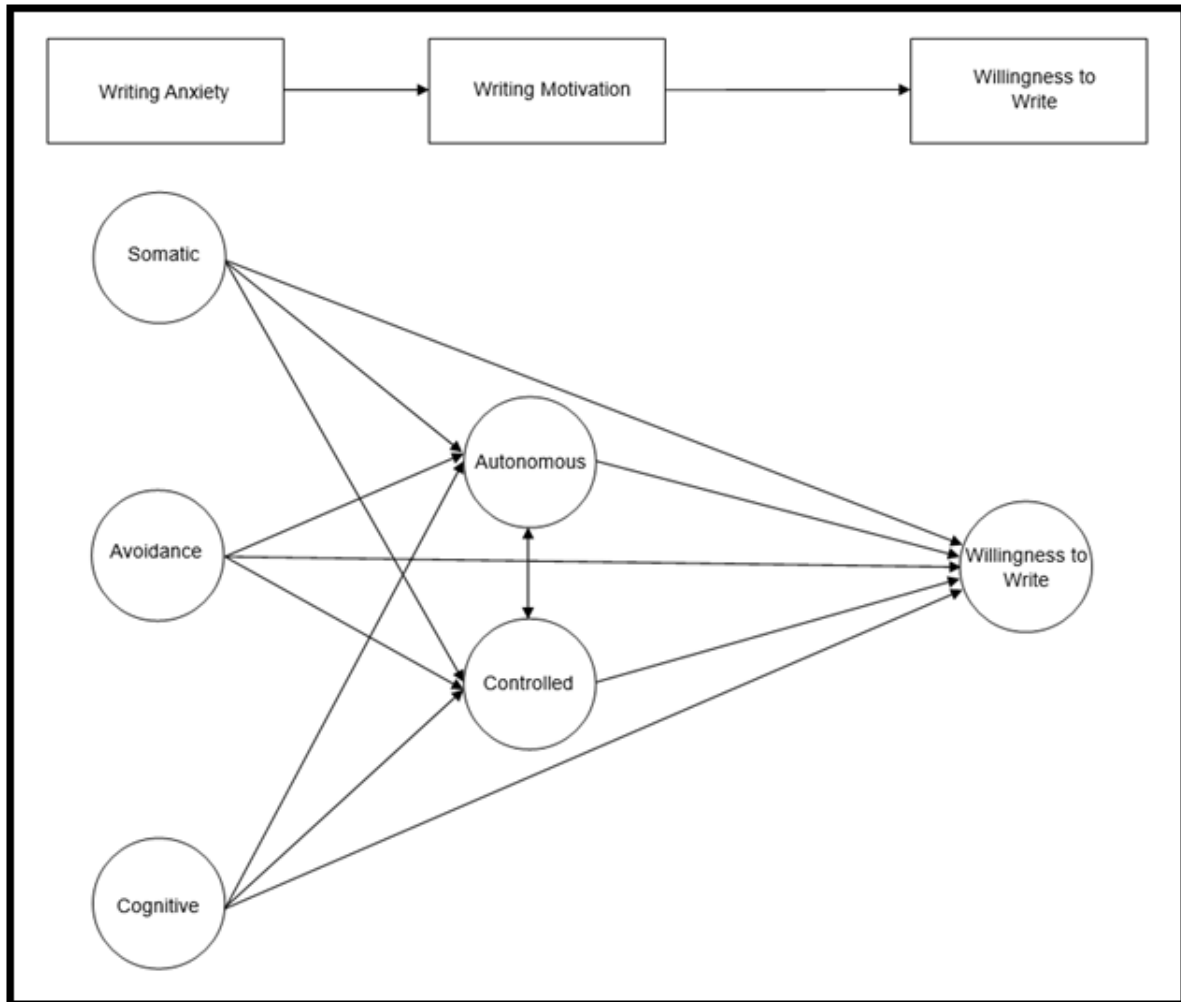


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

### 4. Conclusion

This study explores the concept of WTW in the context of ESL, investigating the various factors that influence this behavioural pattern, all while grounded in the principles of Foreign Language Anxiety Theory and Self-Determination Theory. The aim is to create a comprehensive model that deepens the understanding of WTW by integrating various theories and factors, offering valuable insights for both educators and learners in the field of L2 writing.

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### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research.

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