ANXIETY AS IT PERTAINS TO EFL WRITING ABILITY AND PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of a study conducted to find (a) the impact of anxiety on EFL learners' writing performance, and (b) the relationship between anxiety and foreign language writing ability. 137 (N = 137) EFL learners took the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), the Oxford Placement Test (OPT), and a writing task on a sensitive political topic. Results of the FLCAS were used to assess the participants' degrees of trait, state, and situational anxiety, and OPT scores indicated their proficiency levels. The writing task scores were used as a measure for the participants' writing task performance. Regression and partial correlation analyses were conducted. The findings of the study showed that state anxiety is debilitative whereas situational anxiety and trait anxiety are facilitative. It was concluded that mitigation strategies, discursive textual techniques, and the use of passive voice are in fact triggered by state anxiety rather than by writers' face-saving intentions or their inclination to show politeness.

Keywords: Trait Anxiety, State Anxiety, Situation-Specific Anxiety, Horwitz, FLCAS.

INTRODUCTION

The question of whether 'anxiety' is debilitative or facilitative for language learning has attracted the attention of language researchers over the past few decades. Several studies have been conducted in different countries of the world in which different skills in different languages have been addressed. Marwan (2007), for instance, noticed that foreign language learning situations are anxiety-prone. Earlier, in 1998, von Worde (1998) had argued that over 50% of foreign language learners experience some sort of anxiety in foreign language classes. Moreover, Kondo and Ling (2004) had noticed that anxiety might pose certain problems for language learners. Other researchers who studied anxiety in the context of foreign language learning include Gregersen (2005), Chen and Chang (2004), and Horwitz (1991). To the best of the author's knowledge, however, very few studies have addressed anxiety in relation to EFL in the Iranian context. This study, therefore, set out to shed light on two major issues: (a) the impact of anxiety on Iranian EFL learners' argumentative writing performance, and (b) the relationship between anxiety and foreign language writing ability.

Background

Papamihiel (2002) defined anxiety as "threats to self-efficacy and appraisals of situations as threatening" (p. 331); anxiety refers to the feeling of lack of comfort which arises from something which is threatening (Koba, Ogawa, & Wilkinson, 2000). Along the same lines, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) took anxiety to refer to the feeling of "tension and apprehension experienced by learners in the foreign language classroom" (cited in Marwan, 2007).

Virtually every individual is vulnerable to anxiety. It is often a natural and normal reaction to stressors. Although anxiety is not always abnormal or pathological, in some people it becomes so severe that it can be considered a form of psychological abnormality—technically called 'anxiety disorder' and less technically 'fear'. The term anxiety disorder is often used as an umbrella term to cover several different forms of abnormal and pathological fear (Berrios, 1999). People who suffer from anxiety disorder may experience a range of emotions from simple nervousness to breath-taking panic and terror (Barker, 2003). Gelder, Mayou, and Geddes (2005) have argued that anxiety disorders are classifiable into two groups: (a)

continuous symptoms, and (b) episodic symptoms.

Whether an individual shows continuous or episodic symptoms is a matter of the degree of severity of anxiety. All in all, the symptoms may fall into any of the four groups of (a) physical, (b) emotional, (c) cognitive, or (d) behavioral symptoms. Physical symptoms include rapid pulsation of the heart, feelings of fatigue, headaches, and so on. Emotional symptoms may include feelings of tension and jumpiness, anticipation of trouble, restlessness, having nightmares, feelings of obsession, and the like. Cognitive symptoms are observed when anxiety finds its way to thoughts about fears (e.g., fear of death, HIV, etc.). Finally, behavioral symptoms may emerge in the form of avoidance behavior, changes in patterns of sleep, foot tapping, nail biting, and so forth (Barker, 2003).

Anxiety should not be confused with fear; they are different constructs. First, anxiety is a kind of mood which may occur without any tangible stimulus. By way of contrast, fear is a kind of emotion people show in response to a situation in which they perceive some kind of threat (Barlow, 2002). Second, fear can almost always be avoided whereas anxiety is most often inescapable (Ohaman, 2000). Next, anxiety is often durable and lasts long while fear is most often, if not always, temporary and transient. In addition, fear is felt when a threat is present (i.e., it temporally belongs to the here-and-now) whereas anxiety pertains to some diffuse future threat (Sylvers, Laprarie, and Lilienfeld, 2011).

Attempts at classifying anxiety into different classes have resulted in the emergence of several taxonomies. For one thing, three main classes of anxiety have been suggested: (1) Trait Anxiety, (2) State Anxiety, and (3) Situation-Specific (or Situational) Anxiety. Trait anxiety has to do with the individual's personality and is often stable; it reflects the individual's often unconscious anxiety in response to threatening conditions (Schwarzer, 1997; Wright & Giddey, 1997). Individuals with trait anxiety are often anxious and nervous (Goldberg, 1993). An individual with trait anxiety becomes anxious and irritated in virtually every situation (Speilberger, 1983). Unlike trait anxiety, state anxiety is a transient emotional condition in which the individual shows fear about a specific activity or situation (MacIntyre, 1999). It is often accompanied by behavioral symptoms such as fidgeting. It is a temporary feeling of nervousness which changes in degree through time; it is the experience of anxiety (MacIntyre, 1999). Finally, situation-specific anxiety is very much similar to trait anxiety. The main difference between the two is that situation-specific anxiety relates to only one specific situation; it is not stable in different situations and/or contexts. An example of situation-specific anxiety is the feeling of anxiety experienced by students on a test.

Another perspective on anxiety has been proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1997) who suggested that anxiety is the function of two factors: (a) challenge level, and (b) skill level as shown in Figure 1. According to Csikszentmihalyi, anxiety is very much expected when an individual's skill level is low but the challenge level of the task s/he is expected to perform is high. Earlier, in the 1990s, Young (1994) had argued that anxiety could be classified as either facilitative or debilitative. According to Young, facilitative anxiety results from an increase in drive level which turns up into improved task performance. Debilitative anxiety, on the other hand, is the product of an expansion in the arousal level which ends in poor task performance (Young, 1994). Along the same lines, Horwitz M.B Horwitz, E.K Horwitz and Cope (1986) argued that Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) is an independent unique construct. They argued that FLCA is "a distinctive complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings

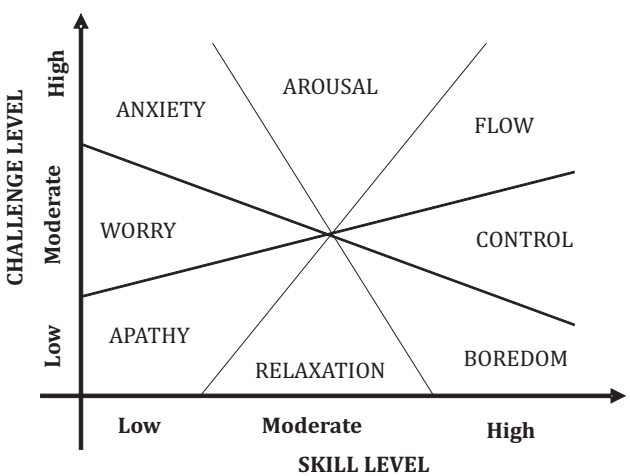

Figure 1. Csikszentmihalyi's Model of Flow.

and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p.128). McIntyre and Gardner defined FLCA as a "subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system" (McIntyre and Gardner,1994, p.217). Earlier, in 1991, they had argued that Foreign Language Learners (FLLs) experience FLCA, because they have negative expectations from foreign language learning; other researchers attribute the emergence and development of FLCA to other sources including classroom factors (Piniel, 2006; Price, 1991).

Horwitz, et al. (1986) claimed that FLCA is the function of three elements: (a) communication apprehension, (b) test anxiety, and (c) fear of negative evaluation. Daly (1991) defined communication apprehension as individuals' fear to communicate. This fear can occur in real communication as well as in anticipated communication and is usually accompanied by shyness (Mejias, Appllbaum, Applbaum & Trotter, 1991). Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that communication apprehension results in a situation where foreign language students have "little control of the communication and their performance is constantly monitored" (p. 127). The second component of FLCA is test anxiety. It stems from an amalgamation of physiological over-arousal, worry, and dread about test performance (Mandler & Sarason, 1952). It often interferes with learning and leads to unsatisfactorily low performance on tests. Students who have the experience of poor performance on test on previous occasions may encounter test anxiety due to their negative thinking about test taking (Sarason, 1984). Students who are perfectionists and take it too hard on themselves are more vulnerable to test anxiety; it is therefore quite normal to see that even the most competent students show signs of test anxiety. The last component of FLCA results from learners' fear of losing face in the eyes of others. Horwitz et al. (1986) described this as "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (p. 128). Fear of negative evaluation permeates almost all aspects of the foreign language classroom and may take place in any evaluative situation. It is a self-defense mechanism whereby the learner tries to safe-guard oneself against negative evaluation by others. Aida (1994) noticed that learners who use this self-defense mechanism are apt to "sit passively in the classroom, withdrawing from classroom activities that could otherwise enhance their improvement of the language skills" or even "cutting class to avoid anxiety situations" (p. 157).

Since its introduction, several research projects have focused on FLCA. For one thing, Aida (1994) found a correlation between learners' sex and the degree of FLCA they experience. This finding was later supported by another study conducted by Baker and MacIntyre (2000). Along the same lines, Bailey, Onwuegbuzie, and Daley (1998; 2000) found a correlation between learners' age and their degree of FLCA. As yet another example, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) noticed the impact of personality traits on FLCA. Bailey, Daley, and Onwuegbuzie (1999), too, studied the effects of learners' negative self-perception on degrees of FLCA they experience. Other people who studied FLCA include Curran (1976), Gardner, Smythe, Clément and Gliksman (1976), Kleinmann (1977), and Scovel (1978) among many others.

The studies cited above are just a few examples that show the involvement of language researchers in research on FLCA. To the best of the author's knowledge, however, very few studies have been conducted on this topic in Iran. The aim of the present study is twofold: (1) to show the possible impact of anxiety on Iranian EFL learners' argumentative writing performance, and (2) to delineate the relationship between anxiety and Iranian EFL learners' foreign language writing ability.

Method

Participants

The participants for this study were 137 (N = 137) adult EFL learners selected randomly from a University in Iran. 76 of the participants were female (nf = 76), and 61 were male (nm = 61). The female participants' average age was 19.2 years, and that of the male participants was 19.9 years. All of the participants were Iranian University

students majoring in English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Instruments

The study had two independent variables (i.e., anxiety and proficiency), and one dependent variable (writing task performance). Therefore, three instruments were used.

The first instrument used in this study was Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS); this questionnaire was administered to the sample to measure the participants' level and type of anxiety. In order to estimate the reliability of FLCAS, a Cronbach alpha was run. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha was conducted on the 33 items of FLCAS. The obtained alpha was 0.594 which was not that acceptable. Therefore, the item total correlations were inspected. Items 2, 5, 8, 14, 18, 22, 28, 32 were discarded from FLCAS since they negatively correlated with the total scale score. The reliability of the modified version of FLCAS, with the remaining 25 items, was estimated at alpha = 0.835. The resulting Cronbach's alpha indicated that the modified tool had a high enough reliability index to be used.

In order to examine the construct of items in the FLCAS questionnaire a principal component analysis using varimax rotation model was performed. The KMO and Bartlert's test (displayed in Table 1) showed that the data set was appropriate for conducting factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .694, which exceeds the recommended value of .6 (cf., Kaiser 1970, 1974); Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) reached statistical significance (sig. = .000). This supported the factorability of the correlation matrix.

Since the assumptions for factor analysis (i.e., Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity) had not been violated, the factor analysis with three factor solution was conducted. Table 2 displays the results.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.694
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	906 .020
	df	300
	Sig.	.000

Table 1. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Moreover, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered to the sample to measure the subjects' level of proficiency in English. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha was conducted on the 100 items of OPT. The resulting Cronbach's alpha was .97, indicating that the tool was reliable.

A writing task was also administered. The writing task asked the participants to spend 40 minutes to present a written argument or case to an educated reader with no specialist knowledge of the following topic:

The Iranian authorities have decided to show respect for the western powers in their talks on Iran's disputable atomic-program ambitions because the restrictive measures against Iran (as seen in the UN, US, and EU sanctions) have been quite successful in jeopardizing the stability of the Iranian economy. Faced with the fear of economic collapse, Iran has no choice other than giving in to the pressure from the West.

	Component		
	Trait Anxiety	State Anxiety	Situational Anxiety
hor17	.731		
hor6	.622	-.271	
hor19	.601		
hor21	.597		
hor4	.529		.376
hor23	.510		
hor27	.495		
hor16	.441	.281	
hor13	.419		.321
hor20		.678	
hor3		.657	
hor33		.571	
hor26	.382	.553	
hor9		.520	
hor12		.495	
hor31	.301	.462	
hor29	.309	.424	
hor30	.387	.417	
hor7		.409	
hor25		.405	
hor1			.818
hor10			.754
hor24			.589
hor1			.546
hor11	.281	.273	.408

Table 2. Rotated Component Matrix

The participants were asked to tell the reader (in at least 250 words) to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the opinion described in the topic—and why. They were asked to use their own knowledge, ideas, and experience to support their arguments, and to provide examples and relevant evidence.

Two experienced professors of EFL writing courses (each with over 15 years of teaching experience) used the 'multiple trait scoring rubric' (displayed in the Appendix) to assign scores to the participants' writing performance (Salmani Nodoushan, 2009, 2014a). The inter-rater reliability of the scores was estimated at .877 (alpha = .877). The score sets were then totaled and averaged, and the resulting score set was then scaled to 100 and correlated with the OPT scores. The result, using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation (one-tailed), was r = 0.893 which is a very good validity index for the writing task. Table 3 displays the results.

Procedure

It should be noted that FLCAS is said to show only one kind of anxiety (i.e., FL classroom anxiety), but five professors of psychology evaluated the scale and emphasize that it could also determine trait, state, and situation-specific (or situational) anxiety; they identified the items in the scale which, in their views, would measure each anxiety type; the factor analysis, too, confirmed their views.

The FLCAS and the OPT were administered in one session. After a two-week interval, the writing task was administered. The participants were assured that the results of their performance on the different tests/tasks would remain confidential. Then, based on the participants' performance on the FLCAS, their scores for each anxiety type (i.e., state, trait, and situational) were calculated. The resulting score sets were then scaled to 100 (to make them comparable to the results of the OPT). The scaled scores were then used as the data for statistical analyses.

		OPT Raw Scores	Writing Task Score
OPT Raw Scores	Pearson Correlation	1	.903**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	137	137
Writing Task Score	Pearson Correlation	.903**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	137	137

Table 3. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between OPT and Writing Task

Results

As stated earlier, this study had two aims: (1) to show the possible impact of anxiety on Iranian EFL learners' argumentative writing task performance, and (2) to delineate the relationship between anxiety and Iranian EFL learners' foreign language writing Ability.

To determine the impact of different types of anxiety on writing performance, a multiple regression analysis was conducted with writing performance scores as the dependent and types of anxiety as well as language proficiency as the independent variables. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions for using regression. Table 4 indicates that no assumption had been violated because the R value is not significant.

The impact of each of the variables on participants' writing performance scores was measured. Table 5 displays the results.

The regression equation can be written as:

y = ProficiencyBeta + SituationalBeta + TraitBeta – StateBeta

y = .895 + .069 + .037 -.029 = .972

This means that 97.2% of the variance observed in writing performance is explained by language proficiency, and types of anxiety. 2.8% of the variance is under the control of factors that are not known to the researcher. Of this 97.2%, language proficiency explains 89.5% of the variance, situational anxiety 6.9%, and trait anxiety 3.7%.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.906[a]	.821	.816	5.80659

Table 4. Model Summary

Model	Std. Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)		3.143	.002		
Proficiency	.895	13.472	.000	.307	3.255
Situational Anxiety	.069	1.790	.076	.906	1.104
State Anxiety	-.029	-.396	.693	.259	3.861
Trait Anxiety	.037	.874	.384	.759	1.318

Table 5. Multiple Regression Analysis for Proficiency and Anxiety Types

These are facilitating for the participants because they have a positive impact on participants' performance. However, state anxiety had a debilitative effect. It explained for 2.9% of the negative performance of the participants. Since the tolerance for none of the factors is equal to 1.00, the results of this study are sample-dependent; the results cannot be generalized.

Another aim of this study was to find the probable significant relationships between anxiety as measured by FLCAS and argumentative writing ability as measured by performance on the writing task. To this end, a set of partial correlation analyses was performed controlling for language proficiency. The justification for using partial correlation lies in the fact that this test is a statistic that correlates two variables of interest and at the same time gives the researcher the power of controlling the probable effects of a covariate (Pallant, 2007). In this study, type of anxiety was correlated to writing performance. At the same time, the researcher controlled the probable effects of participants' level of language proficiency. As such, writing performance and anxiety type are the variables of interest and 'proficiency' is the control variable. Before running partial correlation, preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity.

One of the anxiety types under study in this research was 'situational anxiety'. This variable, correlated to writing performance, revealed a negative zero order relationship which is very close to .0 (i.e., r = -.061). Table 6 presents the results of this analysis.

The first half of the table is the normal Pearson product-moment correlation matrix between the variables of interest (i.e., situational anxiety and writing performance), not controlling for the other variable (i.e., proficiency). In this case, a negative relationship (estimated through zero order correlation) was observed [r = -.061, n = 137, p < .4825] with higher levels of situational anxiety associated with lower levels of writing performance. Controlling for proficiency had very little counter-balancing effect on the strength of the negative relationship between the variables. The relationship, though becoming positive, did not change in statistically significant ways due to the operation of language proficiency.

Control		Writing
None	Zero Order Correlation	-.061
	Sig.	.482
	df	135
Proficiency	Partial Correlation	.166
	Sig.	.053
	df	134

Table 6. Partial Correlation for Situational Anxiety and Writing Performance

The same effect of proficiency was observed for the relationship between state anxiety and writing performance. This time, however, the interference of proficiency resulted in a statistically significant change. Although in the zero order correlation the p value was smaller than .0005 (i.e., r = -.721), the effect of proficiency resulted in a drastic change (i.e., r = .042, n = 137 p < .6305). Table 7 displays the results obtained from the analysis.

The last partial correlation was performed between writing performance and trait anxiety. Here again, language proficiency was the covariate. The results of the zero order correlation were very much similar to that of situational anxiety [r = -.089, n = 137, p < .3015]. Controlling for proficiency had an effect on the intensity of the relationship and changed it into a positive one [r = .098, p < .2545]. However, no statistically significant change was observed. Table 8 presents the results of this analysis.

Discussion

The topic chosen for the writing performance task was,

Control		Writing
None	Zero Order Correlation	-.721
	Sig.	.000*
	df	135
Proficiency	Partial Correlation	.042
	Sig.	.630
	df	134

Table 7. Partial Correlation for State Anxiety and Writing Performance

Control		Writing
None	Zero Order Correlation	-.089
	Sig.	.301
	df	135
Proficiency	Partial Correlation	.098
	Sig.	.254
	df	134

Table 8. Partial Correlation for Trait Anxiety and Writing Performance

and still is, a very sensitive one; it can create state anxiety in that there is a lot of sensitivity in Iran about the regime's atomic program and ambitions. Anyone who talks about this topic may face dire consequences unless s/he takes sides with the program. The writing topic and the time limitation set for it were expected to create at least some kind of state anxiety; if it succeeded, the result would leave a negative effect on the participants performance, and in fact it did. The topic created some kind of state anxiety which had a debilitative effect on the participants. As stated earlier, 2.9% of the negative performance of the participants was explained by this type of anxiety. This lends support to the description of state anxiety by MacIntyre (1999), who argues that state anxiety is a transient emotional condition in which the individual shows fear about a specific activity or situation.

Moreover, the raters noticed that the participants had used a lot of textual and discursive strategies in their writing to 'ease the sharpness' of their argumentation and to self-censor. Their redundant use of mitigating strategies, modal auxiliaries, and passive voice also showed that they tried to 'muffle' their argumentation. It seems that such discursive strategies in writing are very much similar to 'fidgeting' in conversation, what MacIntyre (1999) takes to be a symptom of state anxiety. They show that the participants were indeed experiencing anxiety and nervousness while performing the task. This explanation rivals the claims made in politeness studies which assign a 'politeness' and/or 'face-saving' role to mitigation strategies as well as some of the discursive strategies (Salmani Nodoushan, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2012, 2014; Salmani Nodoushan et al., 2011).

Needless to say, feeling of nervousness resulting from state anxiety in conversation are temporary and change in degree through time, but feelings of nervousness in writing are permanent and static; they do not change through time because, when mitigations, modal auxiliaries, passive voice and the like are used in writing, they are fixated and will remain there for ever. The findings also connotes that 'emotional requirements of the task' can in fact cause state anxiety which can be debilitative. This claim was supported by the partial correlation analysis reported in Table 7. The results reported in Table 7 also imply that there should be a threshold level for language proficiency where it can counterbalance the impact of state anxiety—which was not the focus of the current study.

The author's expectation was not to see any negative effects as a result of situational anxiety; the results of the study supported the author's expectation. Situational anxiety was not negative because the author was quite friendly towards the participants during the administration of the tools, the participants knew the author in person, and they knew that this was not a test situation; rather, it was a research situation where participants know that there will be confidentiality in handling names, materials, and so forth. Another explanation for the positive Beta values observed in the regression analysis is that all the instruments (i.e., FLCAS, OPT, and the writing task) may have produced more or less the same degree of situational anxiety for the participants. This can be supported by the partial correlation results; removing proficiency from the correlation analysis for situational anxiety did not result in a statistically significant change in the findings.

The same explanation can be given for the impact of trait anxiety on writing task performance. Someone with trait anxiety will show the same symptom while performing the same tasks. As indicated by Schwarzer (1997) and Wright and Giddey (1997), trait anxiety has to do with the individual's personality and is often stable; it reflects the individual's often unconscious anxiety in response to threatening conditions. As such, someone with trait anxiety can be expected to perceive the same threat in the OPT, the FLCAS, and the writing task. The results of the study lent support to this claim.

Conclusion

The findings of this study resound the claims made by Aida (1994), who argued that state anxiety is indeed a self-defense mechanism. Aida argued that learners with state anxiety would be passive in the classroom; writers with state anxiety in this study used a lot of mitigation in their writing task performance to self-guard and self-censor.

This observation supports Aida's assumptions. The findings of the study also supported what Horwitz et al. (1986) described as "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (p. 128). The author's findings showed that EFL writers who participated in this study used state anxiety to safe-guard themselves against negative evaluation or persecution by others.

Based on the results of the current study and the argumentation presented in the discussion above, it can be concluded that state anxiety is perhaps the most debilitative kind of anxiety for EFL learners in that it actually interferes with writers' attempt at writing as they would normally do in a fear-free situation. This anxiety type can be specifically debilitative when EFL learners are asked to perform language tasks that are emotionally quite demanding and sensitive. Although the findings of the current study do imply that there should be a threshold level for language proficiency where it can counterbalance the impact of state anxiety, the issue was not empirically addressed in the study. A similar study can classify participants into proficiency groups and try to find such a threshold level. Another study can compare expository and argumentative writing tasks (with topics of varying degrees of sensitivity or topics that require differing degrees of self-censorship) to see if state anxiety would have the same impact on both expository and argumentative writing.

Since this study showed that language proficiency can counterbalance (debilitative) state anxiety, one recommendation is that demanding writing tasks and courses be delayed for later terms during EFL programs; in the mean time, teachers should be asked to help EFL learners advance their language proficiency. Another recommendation is that EFL teachers should be required to avoid creating anxiety-prone situations like ones in which students are directly criticized and/or evaluated. One strategy would be for the teachers to give their students written feedback in which they only describe the errors students had in their writings and recommend ways of avoiding them, but it is extremely important that the teacher should not use evaluative comments and personal criticism which can threaten students' self-images. In other words, describing errors and providing remedial instruction are helpful, but evaluative comments should be avoided. These strategies can lower students' state anxiety which will turn up into their higher performance on writing tasks.

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Appendix

Multiple Trait Scoring Rubric for scoring students' writing (Based on Hyland, 2003, p. 231)

Trait	Trait Components	Score	Symptoms
Content	Explicitness of events	1	Events not stated
		2	Events only sketchy
		3	Events fairly clearly stated
		4	Event explicitly stated
	Documentation of events	1	No recognizable events
		2	Clearly documents events
		3	Includes most events
		4	Clearly documents events
	Evaluation of the significance of events	1	None or confused evaluation
		2	Little or weak evaluation
		3	Some evaluation of events
		4	Full evaluation of events
	Providing personal comment	1	No or weak personal comment
		2	Inadequate personal comment
		3	Some personal comment
		4	Personal comment on events
Structure	Orientation of the writing assignment	1	Missing or weak orientation
		2	Orientation gives some information
		3	Fairly well-developed orientation
		4	Orientation gives all essential information
	Providing background	1	No background provided
		2	Some necessary background omitted
		3	Most actors and events mentioned
		4	All necessary background provided
	Sequencing	1	Haphazard and incoherent sequencing
		2	Account partly coherent
		3	Largely chronological and coherent
		4	Account in chronological/other order
	Provision of reorientation	1	No reorientation or includes new matter
		2	Some attempt to provide reorientation
		3	Reorientation largely "rounds off" sequence
		4	Reorientation "rounds off" sequence
Language	Control of language	1	Little language control
		2	Inconsistent language control
		3	Good control of language
		4	Excellent control of language
	Use of vocabulary	1	Reader seriously distracted
		2	Lacks variety and is verbose
		3	Adequate vocabulary choice
		4	Excellent use of vocabulary
	Choice of grammar	1	Reader seriously distracted
		2	Lacks variety and richness
		3	Adequate grammar choice
		4	Excellent use of grammar
	Appropriateness of tone and style	1	Poor tone and style
		2	Inconsistent tone and style
		3	Mainly appropriate tone and style
		4	Appropriate tone and style

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mohammad Ali Salmani Nodoushan has received his PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Tehran. He has over 20 years of teaching experience and has taught major EFL courses at Under Graduate and Post Graduate levels. He has published several papers in International scholarly Journals including Teaching and Teacher Education, Speech Communication, TESL Canada Journal, and so on. In addition, he has (co)authored a number of books. He is one of the Editorial Board Member of a couple of International scholarly Journals including The Journal of Asia TEFL, Asian EFL Journal, and The Linguistics Journal, and also the Editor of the International Journal of Language Studies (IJLS).