

**In the name of God**



**Imam Khomeini International University**

**Faculty of Humanities**

**English Language Department**

**MA Thesis Proposal**

**Entitled**

**On the relationship between writing apprehension, personality traits, strategy use, and writing accuracy across proficiency levels**

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**Winter 2014**

## Introduction

Writing is an essential skill that is vital for academic success. Due to the importance of this skill in language learning, especially among university students majoring in English who are exposed to English language in all their courses and are expected to have complete mastery over the writing skill, a great deal of attention should be paid to this area of language. Since writing is an active, productive skill, students learning to write in a foreign language (FL) face multiple challenges (Erkan & Saban, 2011). As Richards and Renandya (2002) note, there is no doubt that writing is the most difficult language skill for language learners to master and the difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing ideas, but also in translating these ideas into readable text. Many students, university students in particular, find writing sophisticated and view it as something that they have just to tackle in order to pass their exams. This may be due to affective factors such as students' level of writing apprehension, self-efficacy in writing, self-esteem, self-concept, motivation, attitudes towards writing, emotional intelligence, personality and writing strategy use.

The term 'writing apprehension' was first used by Daly and Miller in 1975. Writing apprehension is defined as "dispositional attitudes, existing over time and context and situational attitudes specific to particular tasks" (Rife & Stacks, 1988, p. 39). Regarding the fact that anxiety is one of the factors affecting the process of learning, many students, even university students who have a good command of English, find the mere thought of writing anxiety-including. Zhang (2001) and Hilleson (1996) state that when students are engaged in activities that require productive skills, they experience a considerable amount of anxiety. As a productive skill, writing has been viewed as a demanding process. Research suggests that writing anxiety occurs because of language complexity in general and complexity of writing as a skill in particular (Bruning & Horn, 2000). As a naturally occurring phenomenon, anxiety exists in every part of human life; the anxiety experienced while writing is considered as one of anxiety. Previous studies have reported that nearly 80% of American students fear their composition courses and estimated 25% of American students suffer from severe writing anxiety (Bloom, 1980). The difficulty of writing in a FL as a task tends to strengthen anxiety levels in students who are taking writing

courses. This anxiety can often lead to discouragement, and thus may result in negative attitudes towards writing (Gere, 1987).

Accordingly, Pajares and Valinate (1996) propose that if a student is unwilling to express him/herself in writing, lacks confidence in his or her ability to write, or feels apprehensive about writing, the student is unlikely to be proficient at writing compositions. Over the past 30 years, an enormous amount of research has been done on the writing processes that student writers undertake (Abu Shawish & Atea, 2010; Al Asamari, 2013; Daly, 1978; Daly & Miller, 1975; Daly & Wilson, 1983; Erkan & Saban, 2011; Hanna, 2010; Huwari & Abd Aziz, 2011; Latif, 2007; Pajares & Johnson, 1993; Phinney, 1991; Singh & Rajalingam 2012; Shell, Colvin, & Bruning, 1995; Shell, Murphy, & Bruning, 1989; Woodrow, 2011). Most research on L2 anxiety has focused on classroom speaking and listening situations. However, very little attention has been paid to anxiety as it pertains to L2 writing. So the purpose of the present study is to explore the relationships between writing apprehension, self-efficacy in writing, writing accuracy, attitudes towards writing, self-esteem, academic self-concept, motivation, emotional intelligence, students' writing strategy use, and their personality in an Iranian EFL context and the extent to which students' grammatical and lexical writing accuracy might be affected by the variables under study.

### **Significance of the Study**

Due to the fact that writing is one of the productive skills enabling people to communicate with one another and to express their thoughts and ideas, it is an integral part of everyday life. Therefore, students must realize that they have to possess certain skills that qualify them to cope with the complexity of writing in a FL. Teachers always try to develop students' writing skills. As it was mentioned earlier, anxiety is one of the factors affecting the learning process; therefore, language teachers should help students to achieve writing ability by decreasing students' level of apprehension because apprehension can cause stress, and stress inhibits learning. Thus, it is reasonable to speculate that success with writing in a foreign language may be related

to some affective factors such as apprehension about writing, and self-efficacy in writing, students' personality (whether they are extrovert or introvert), self-esteem, self-concept, motivation, and attitudes towards writing. Considering anxiety as a barrier to language learning, the findings of the study in hand might be helpful for both teachers and language learners in that they can identify the probable sources of anxiety as it pertains to writing and try to eliminate them. So, the purpose of this study is to explore the relationships between writing apprehension, the affective factors mentioned above and writing accuracy of Iranian EFL learners at different proficiency levels.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Many EFL learners in Iran feel uncomfortable when they attempt writing tasks, even students who are proficient at other language skills share the same problems with writing. Although some of them have a good command of English vocabulary, when it comes to writing and expressing their ideas in written form, they fail. They think what mainly causes their stress when practicing writing is their inability to use proper vocabulary, to generate new ideas, to link sentences together to get a cohesive unit, and sometimes their teachers' evaluation of their writings or a negative feedback they may receive from their teachers. Experience shows that the problem is more complicated than what students perceive. Writing anxiety may arise due to cognitive, linguistic or affective factors. Affective factors include writing apprehension, which can be the result of low self-efficacy in writing, low self-esteem, self-concept, having negative attitudes towards writing, or something inborn related to students' personality. Therefore, what the present study is aimed to do is to examine if there is any relationship between Iranian EFL learners' writing apprehension and the variables under study. It also investigates the effect of the afore-mentioned variables on EFL grammatical and lexical writing accuracy.

### **Research Question**

The present study seeks to find the answer to the following questions:

- 1) Are there any significant differences between the selected personal traits as predictors of writing apprehension?
- 2) Is there a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' writing apprehension and their grammatical writing accuracy?
- 3) Is there a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' writing apprehension and their lexical writing accuracy?
- 4) Are there any significant differences in the writing apprehension of EFL learners across proficiency levels?
- 5) Are there any significant differences between different types of writing strategies as predictors of writing apprehension?
- 6) Are there any significant differences between the selected personal traits as predictors of lexical writing accuracy?
- 7) Are there any significant differences between the selected personal traits as predictors of grammatical writing accuracy?
- 8) Is there any relationship between Iranian EFL learners' writing accuracy and their emotional intelligence?
- 9) Is there a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' writing accuracy and extroversion?
- 10) Are there any significant differences between writing strategies as predictors of lexical writing accuracy?
- 11) Are there any significant differences between writing strategies as predictors of grammatical writing accuracy?
- 12) Is there a relationship between Iranian EFL learners' writing accuracy and their motivation?
- 13) Are there any significant differences between writing strategies as predictors of attitude towards writing?
- 14) Is there a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards writing and their motivation?
- 15) Is there any relationship between Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards writing and their self-esteem?
- 16) Is there any relationship between Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards writing and extroversion?
- 17) Is there any relationship between Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards writing and their self-efficacy in writing?

- 18) Are there any significant differences in Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards writing across proficiency levels?
- 19) Is there any relationship between Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards writing and their emotional intelligence?
- 20) Are there any significant differences in Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy in writing across proficiency levels?
- 21) Are there any significant differences between writing strategies as predictors of writing self-efficacy?
- 22) Are there any significant differences between the selected personal traits as predictors of writing self-efficacy?
- 23) Are there any significant differences in Iranian EFL learners' writing strategy use across proficiency levels?
- 24) Are there any significant differences among writing strategies as predictors of self-esteem?
- 25) Are there any significant differences among writing strategies as predictors of extroversion?
- 26) Are there any significant differences among writing strategies as predictors of motivation?
- 27) Are there any significant differences in Iranian EFL learners' self-esteem across proficiency levels?
- 28) Is there any relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-esteem and introversion?
- 29) Is there any relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-esteem and motivation?
- 30) Is there any relationship between Iranian EFL learners' writing apprehension and academic self-concept?

## **Research Hypotheses**

In response to the above research questions, the following null hypotheses are formulated:

- 1) There are no significant differences between the selected personal traits as predictors of writing apprehension.

- 2) There is no significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' writing apprehension and their grammatical writing accuracy.
- 3) There is no significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' writing apprehension and their lexical writing accuracy.
- 4) There are no significant differences in the writing apprehension of EFL learners across proficiency levels.
- 5) There are no significant differences between different types of writing strategies as predictors of writing apprehension.
- 6) There are no significant differences between the selected personal traits as predictors of lexical writing accuracy.
- 7) There are no significant differences between the selected personal traits as predictors of lexical writing accuracy.
- 8) There is no relationship between Iranian EFL learners' writing accuracy and their emotional intelligence.
- 9) There is no significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' writing accuracy and extroversion.
- 10) There are no significant differences between writing strategies as predictors of lexical writing accuracy.
- 11) There are no significant differences between writing strategies as predictors of grammatical writing accuracy.
- 12) There is no relationship between Iranian EFL learners' writing accuracy and their motivation.
- 13) There are no significant differences between writing strategies as predictors of attitude towards writing.
- 14) There is no significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards writing and their motivation.
- 15) There is no relationship between Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards writing and their self-esteem.
- 16) There is no relationship between Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards writing and extroversion.
- 17) There is no relationship between Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards writing and their self-efficacy in writing.
- 18) There are no significant differences in Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards writing across proficiency levels.

- 19) There is no relationship between Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards writing and their emotional intelligence.
- 20) There are no significant differences in Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy in writing across proficiency levels.
- 21) There are no significant differences between writing strategies as predictors of writing self-efficacy.
- 22) There are no significant differences between the selected personal traits as predictors of writing self-efficacy.
- 23) There are no significant differences in Iranian EFL learners' writing strategy use across proficiency levels.
- 24) There are no significant differences among writing strategies as predictors of self-esteem.
- 25) There are no significant differences among writing strategies as predictors of extroversion.
- 26) There are no significant differences among writing strategies as predictors of motivation.
- 27) There are no significant differences in Iranian EFL learners' self-esteem across proficiency levels.
- 28) There is no relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-esteem and introversion.
- 29) There is no relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-esteem and motivation.
- 30) There is no relationship between Iranian EFL learners' writing apprehension and academic self-concept.

## **Review of Literature**

Many studies, some of which will be reviewed below, have been conducted to examine the effect of a variety of factors having to do with learners' cognitive and affective factors pertaining to the teaching and assessment processes of L2 learners' writing. A large number of studies have been conducted on the relationship between affective factors and language learners' writing ability. With writing apprehension being one of the independent variables of present study, the following paragraphs will elaborate on this affective factor. Daly and Miller (1975) were the first to introduce



the term writing apprehension. They defined writing apprehension as “a subjective complex of attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral interaction which reinforces each other” (p. 11).

Daly and Miller (1975a) constructed the Writing Apprehension Test (WAT), which included items pertaining to anxiety about writing in general, teacher evaluation of writing, peer evaluation of writing and professional evaluations of writing, letter writing, writing environments, writing in tests, and self-evaluation of writing and its worth. Daly and Miller (1975b) then used the verbal SAT scores of undergraduates enrolled in composition courses and compared them with results on the Writing Apprehension Test finding that writing apprehension scores had “powerful effects on individuals’ attitude toward and behavior in writing courses” (p. 250). Therefore, individuals with greater writing apprehension had lower expectations about their grades, and were less willing to take additional coursework (p. 254), and individuals with less writing apprehension were more likely to take advanced courses and women experienced less writing apprehension overall (p. 255).

This part of review of literature is concerned with a series of studies relating writing apprehension to a variety of other personality traits. Research suggests that there is an inverse relationship between apprehension and self-esteem (Daly & Wilson, 1983). In addition, comments from English teachers indicate that the way a student feels about him/herself affects, and is affected by, how he or she writes (Hanna, 2010). Therefore, students who are apprehensive about writing tend to feel less positive about themselves (Daly & Wilson, 1983).

In a study carried out by Daly and Miller (1975a), about 180 students enrolled in composition courses completed three questionnaires on writing apprehension and general self-esteem. The results showed that writing apprehension and general self-esteem were negatively correlated. To be able to generalize the findings of this study, three more investigations were carried out on this issue. Two of the samples were composed of elementary and high school teachers enrolled in communication courses and the third sample consisted of employees of a government agency. Every participant completed a multi-dimensional measure of self-esteem as well as the writing apprehension measure. The results supported the findings of the previously

reported research. For all three samples, the multiple correlations between writing apprehension and the five factor self-esteem measure were statically significant and, as expected, inversely related.

Huwari and Abd Aziz (2011) attempted to explain the relationship of writing in English and writing apprehension among Jordanian postgraduate students studying in Malaysia. They also looked into the effect of age, socio-economic status and the situations in which the learners were asked to write. The results of the study indicated that Jordanian postgraduate students suffered from a high level of writing apprehension and their age had a significant effect on their apprehension; the older learners experienced higher levels of writing apprehension. The socio-economic status of the learners as well as the situations in which they were required to write also played a crucial role in the their level of apprehension. It also showed that students feel more apprehensive when writing a thesis than writing journals or writing assignments.

Other studies have been conducted on the relationship between writing apprehension, writing performance, and writing self-efficacy. Singh and Rajalingam (2012) explored the relationship between writing apprehension level and self-efficacy beliefs on writing proficiency level among pre-university students. 320 pre-university students from a northern region college participated in this study. All the respondents were administered three instruments measuring their writing apprehension levels and writing self-efficacy beliefs and their writing proficiency. The writing apprehension levels among these respondents were found to be average. Self-efficacy factors revealed an inverse relationship with writing apprehension level. The analysis of the relationship between writing apprehension level and writing proficiency indicated that the higher the apprehension level the better the respondents' performance. In accordance with this study, Latif (2007) states that skilled writers who have positive beliefs about their writing ability are expected to do well when they are assigned writing tasks. This is in line with the findings of Woodrow's (2011) study. The results of his study indicate a significant relationship between writing self-efficacy and writing performance. The study also revealed a strong negative correlation between writing apprehension and writing performance.

Takahashi (2004) investigated whether or not writing apprehension amongst Japanese EFL learners was related to motivation, self-perceived language ability, and actual proficiency and/or class achievement. Writing apprehension was found to be negatively related to all the variables. Its associations with those variables were stronger than those of general language anxiety. This may suggest that writing in English is a weakness amongst Japanese EFL learners, and that writing is one of the most unpopular and disliked activities in the classroom. Educators and teachers should be aware that some students become highly apprehensive about writing in English, and that this apprehension is positively associated with low motivation, low self-perceived proficiency, low proficiency, and low performance.

In short, writing apprehension is a communication issue that affects approximately 10-25% of people (Atkison, 2011). Students, who experience writing apprehension in higher education settings, make choices to minimize this apprehension when they are assigned writing tasks. Writing strategy use and proficiency levels as well as personality traits affect the level of writing apprehension experienced by a student. Previous research suggests that except for affective factors or personality traits, students' level of proficiency has a direct relationship with students' writing ability in general and their writing apprehension in particular. So, this study aims to study a large sample composed of both male and female students in an EFL context exploring the relationship between all the aforementioned factors.

## **Method**

This section deals with the participants, instruments, procedures, and data analysis.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study will be 150 Iranian EFL learners, both undergraduate and postgraduate. Since the sampling will be done based on availability, it will be of a convenience type. The participants will be both male and female.

## **Instruments**

Data for the study will be collected through a language proficiency test, 10 questionnaires, one writing task, and a scoring rubric for evaluating students' writing. Oxford Quick Placement Test/OPT (Oxford University Press & University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, 2001) will be used to determine the language proficiency level of the participants. In addition, the participants will take the Writing Apprehension Test/WAT (Daly & Miller, 1975), the self-efficacy scale (SWS) developed by Yavuz-Erkan (2004), the self-esteem scale developed by Rosenberg (RSES), Rose's (1984) attitude-towards writing questionnaire (WAQ), the academic self-concept scale by Liu and Wang (2005), the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire for adults (EPQ), a modified version of Hirata's (2010) questionnaire for assessing motivation, and a modified version of Writing Strategy Use Inventory SLWAI (Petric & Czarl, 2003). The emotional intelligence (EI) of the participants will also be measured through the Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT).

## **Scoring Rubric**

To assess the grammatical and lexical writing accuracy of the students, a modified version of the grading rubric used by Paulus (1999) will be used in this study. The scoring rubric is based on a ten-point scale with the following writing aspects: organization, development, cohesion, structure, vocabulary, and mechanics. In this scale, organization refers to the effectiveness of the thesis statement and unity of ideas, development refers to the appropriate use of examples and support, cohesion refers to the relationship of ideas to each other and the use of transitions, structure refers to syntax complexity and grammatical accuracy, vocabulary refers to clarity of meaning and the precision of the words used, and mechanics refers to spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and general formatting. To assess the grammatical and lexical writing accuracy of the students only the structure and vocabulary aspects of this scale will be used.

### **Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT)**

The participants' proficiency levels will be assessed by means of the Oxford Quick Placement Test. The OQPT contains 60 standardized multiple-choice items, in cloze test format and includes grammar and vocabulary sections. The participants will be supposed to choose the correct choices in 35 minutes.

### **Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT)**

The EI questionnaire titled Assessing Emotions Scale developed by Schutte et al. (1998) will be used to identify the participants' EI profiles. This questionnaire is a one-factor scale, consisting of 33 items and scores from 33 to 165. The higher the score, the higher the EI.

### **Writing Apprehension Test (WAT)**

In this study, Daly and Miller's (1975a) WAT will be used to assess students' apprehension about writing. It is a standard writing apprehension measure and has been widely used across time with various groups of respondents. This scale consists of 26 items dealing with students' tendencies not to write, attitudes towards writing tasks and feelings as they write. The questionnaire is scored on a five-point Likert type scale with five choices ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

### **Self-Efficacy in Writing Scale (SWS)**

The self-efficacy scale developed by Yavuz-Erkan (2004) will be used to assess the students' self-efficacy in writing. Based on the self-efficacy construct proposed by Bandura (1977), Yavuz-Erkan developed a 21-item writing self-efficacy scale to grade the strength of subjects' belief in their writing ability. The items of the scale is graded with the four-tier system Likert scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree. Each statement on the scale is preceded by the phrase "I can ..."

### **Attitude-Towards-Writing Questionnaire (WAQ)**

Rose's (1984) attitude towards writing questionnaire, which refers to respondent's feelings about his or her writing, tries to examine the link between the students' attitudes towards writing and their actual writing accuracy. It consists of 24 items. The items are scored on a Likert type scale with choices ranging from Almost Always, Often, Sometimes, Occasionally, or Almost Never.

### **Motivation Questionnaire**

A modified version of Hirata's (2010) motivation questionnaire will be used in the present study. It consists of a variety of statements to assess motivational orientation and the key sources of motivational beliefs. It includes two scales: (1) motivational orientation (12 items) and (2) motivational beliefs (14 items). In total, it is a 26- item questionnaire which is designed to assess variables related to motivation on a five-point Likert type scale with choices ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

### **Self-esteem Scale (RSES)**

Rosenberg's (1979) self-esteem scale is a well-known 10-item scale that has been used with various populations. It measures global self-esteem thereby providing good indication of general rather than specific views of the self. Participants will be asked to indicate their agreement with statements about the self. The items of the scale will be graded with the four-tier system Likert scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree.

### **Academic Self-concept Scale**

The original academic self-concept scale by Liu and Wang (2005) will be used in this study. It includes two sub scales: (a) academic confidence, and (b) academic effort, each with 10 items to collect information about the students' academic self-concept information. The items of the scale will be graded on a five-point Likert type scale that includes choices ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

### **EPQ (Eysenck Personality Questionnaire)**

In order to differentiate between extrovert and introvert language learners, Eysenck Personality Questionnaire for adult (EPQ) which was developed by Eysenck (1975) will be used in this study. This questionnaire consists of 21 yes/no question items.

### **Writing Strategies Inventory (SLWAI)**

The researchers will use Petric and Czarl' inventory (2003) to assess students' writing strategies. The inventory consists of 38 items and includes three dimensions. Items (1-8) are concerned with 'before starting' the writing of an essay in English, items (9-22) deal with 'during writing in English', items (23-38) represent 'during revision'. Participants will answer each statement using a five-point Likert type scale ranging from Never true to Always true.

### **Procedure**

Having selected the participants, the researchers will administer the instruments including (WAT), (SWS), (RSES), (EPQ), (WAQ), (OPT), (EI), (WSU), motivation, and academic self-concept questionnaires. Prior to taking the test and completing the questionnaires, the participants will be briefed on the way to answer the test and questionnaires. Then the teacher will give a topic to the students and ask them to write an essay about that topic. The writings of students will be evaluated based on a scoring rubric adapted from Lundstorm and Baker (2009) in order to make an objective evaluation.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected from the test, questionnaires and students' writing performance will be analyzed using statistical analyses, including Pearson correlation coefficients, multiple regression analyses, and ANOVA procedures. The data from the study will be all analyzed using the 21th version of the SPSS software. The analyses will be carried out at a significance level of  $p = .05$ .

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