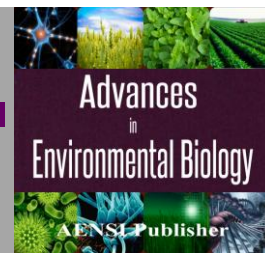




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The Role of Gender in Determining the Writing Anxiety Level among High and Low Achievers

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to find out how gender affects writing anxiety among high and low achievers. A total of 120 students, studying English as a foreign language (EFL) participated in the study. One hundred and twenty students were selected randomly and divided into four groups based on a simulated test of language proficiency (Fowler & Coe 1976). Then they sat for the exam of writing a descriptive essay based on the TOEFL (2003) at the end of the semester. Cheng's (2004) Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) was used to elicit the level of the participants' SLWAI a few minutes after the writing exam. Findings showed that the males performed better than the females in their writing achievement test since the high achievers enjoyed less SLWA than the lower ones. There was also a negative correlation between the writing proficiency level and SLWA among the four groups.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is a very complicated process. Different domains should be considered during language learning. The important domains are affective factors such as motivation, anxiety, and attitude. Recent studies have shown the relationship between affective and other aspects of language learning. One of the main affective factors in learning a foreign language is anxiety. Deutsch [11] defines anxiety as "a basic human emotion that consists of fear and uncertainty" (p. 14). Foreign language anxiety needs consideration for better understanding of what learners experience in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. For this reason, the study of anxiety has increased in recent years.

Many people around the world believe that the ability to write a language equals knowing that language since writing is one of the most important means of human communication. English is taught as a foreign language at different levels in Iran. To get many jobs as well as different university degrees, knowing this language is one of the requirements. In addition, English has gained world-wide reputation and prestige. It is the language of academic purposes as well as the language of science and technology. We face this language in almost all our daily lives. Students in Iran begin to learn English in guidance school while other students in other countries often start learning English much earlier. It has however been seen that some Iranian students, even at intermediate and advanced levels, are unable to write in English.

Almost everyone has experienced anxiety to some degree at some point in his/her life. Some researchers, like Horwitz [15], or MacIntyre and Gardner [20], claim that language courses are very anxiety-provoking. It is generally accepted that anxiety may negatively influence language learning since Cheng [6] cites:

As it is believed, knowledge of English paves the way to academic studies and higher earning jobs. In Iran, English is taught as a foreign language in junior high schools but students at advance levels also have difficulty in writing English as a foreign language. Perhaps one of the important factors affecting this skill is anxiety. Thompson (1980) defines writing anxiety as "a fear of the writing process that outweighs the projected gain from the ability to write"(p. 121).

These sources are very important in understanding writing performance anxiety. The students who suffer from this kind of anxiety may avoid writing, so they can not improve their writing skill especially when they do not try to risk.

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Writing anxiety impacts students' lives and affects them in other courses as well as in their personal, professional, and civic lives outside of school. Students may show different behaviors related to anxiety in foreign language classroom setting like getting nervous in role play activities, not volunteering answers, not participating in oral activities, and coming unprepared to class. Such students are less eager to communicate with others.

Statement of the problem:

There is an important problem that majority of students' face learning and particularly writing as a foreign language. Many learners express their inability and sometimes their failure in learning to write in a foreign language. These learners may be good at learning other skills but when it comes to learning to write another language, they claim to have a problem which hinders or stops them to succeed in learning a foreign language.

On many occasions students feeling of stress, anxiety, or nervousness may impede their language learning and performance abilities. Both teachers and students are aware that and generally feel that anxiety is a major hurdle to be overcome when learning another language.

Writing anxiety may be the most frequently investigated aspect of writers' affect. This construct was first introduced by Daly and Miller [8] and since that time it has been the focus of considerable researches. Writing apprehension mirrors the individual's general tendency to avoid or approach writing situations [9]. Writing anxiety can be used to refer to the feelings of uneasiness writers experience while performing the task.

Suggestions that address Second Language (L2) writing anxiety emphasize re-thinking methods of instructor to student error-correction, community approaches to writing, peer feedback and tutoring, addressing student self-talk and cognition, emphasis of process and form over grammatical concerns, and a reconsideration of the importance of traditional concepts of written content and format [19,6,7,10].

Few researchers, [16,23] have considered writing performance anxiety in second language learning. Being an L2 learner as well as a teacher of English Language Teaching (ELT), the author himself has not only experienced writing performance anxiety but also observed this phenomenon among students of junior high schools and universities. This study is intended to find out why EFL learners feel anxious while writing English. It is generally accepted that in the elementary level, students do not work on paragraph writing. Students at the intermediate level university are addressed because they have writing courses, and also they are more engaged in the writing skill. The following research questions will guide the present study:

RQ₁. Does anxiety affect writing performance of intermediate students?

RQ₂. Is there any relationship between writing performance anxiety and effective writing ability of male and female intermediate students?

RQ₃. Is there any relationship between writing performance anxiety and the level of students' writing proficiency (i.e., low versus high achievers)?

Significance of the study:

Affective factors greatly influence the learning process. Among these factors, anxiety is of paramount importance. Many studies [23,33,36] have been done in the area of language anxiety in general, but few of them [19] have focused on the writing anxiety in particular. Emphasis on learning English as a foreign language is one of the most important requirements in our country. Having a good command of English proficiency, especially in writing skill is needed for getting academic degrees [36].

Many students show unusual anxiety about writing, which often interferes with their ability to learn how to write effectively (Horwitz 2001). It is important to investigate the relationship between the anxiety of writing performance and writing English as a foreign language among Iranian students and also see the extent to which foreign language writing anxiety correlates with gender differences.

This study will explore the relationship between gender and writing performance anxiety of intermediate students. It attempts to show the reasons that cause students to be so anxious in performing writing tasks.

Review of literature:

State anxiety and trait anxiety:

Two main concepts of studies on anxiety are state and trait anxieties. Psychologists distinguish between these two types of anxiety. State anxiety is a temporary condition that is experienced at a particular moment. Spielberger [30] says that state anxiety is a "transitory state or condition of the organism that varies in intensity and fluctuates over time" (p. 12). He mentioned the apprehension experiences before taking an examination as an example of this kind of anxiety, while trait anxiety as suggested by Marwan [22] is a permanent disorder of a persons' character. It is a persons' tendency to feel anxious regardless of the situation they are exposed to. A person who is trait anxious is likely to feel anxious in a variety of situations.

Situation specific anxiety:

Pappamihel [26] postulates "individuals who suffer from situation-specific anxiety may appraise certain events as anxiety-producing only when certain factors are present" (p. 330). He gave an example that a student

may be anxiety-free when writing an essay in English. However, when asked to write a similar essay in French, a second language, the same student may feel higher levels of anxiety (p. 330). Other scholars [16] have distinguished between facilitating and debilitating anxiety. Facilitating anxiety is thought to be a kind of anxiety that improves learning and performance, while debilitating anxiety is associated with poor learning and performance. As a psychological construct, anxiety has been viewed as a unitary response or a combination of responses. Early studies tended to treat anxiety as a unitary construct [12]. Tryon [32] asserted that anxiety is a multidimensional construct with at least two components: worry and emotionality.

Anxiety in language learning:

Anxiety as interpreted by Scovel [28], is "the feeling of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension or worry" (p. 134), but when anxiety is seen within the research area of second language process, it should be classified as a specific anxiety reactions. Anxiety in language learning is a complex matter that its existence can affect the process of language learning. Some students who are proficient and motivated in other learning situations may feel pressure and obstacle in foreign language learning because of the arousal of the anxiety in the specific situation of language learning.

In the theoretical research framework of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope [17], foreign language anxiety relates to performance evaluation within social and academic domains. Accordingly, foreign language can be discussed in three parallel constructs of performance anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative social evaluation, and test anxiety.

Some researchers have suggested that anxiety might be the result of poor performance. Skehan asserted that the "influence of anxiety changed as a function of ability level" (p. 115). In a study performed to show the theoretical perspectives on anxiety in the field of language learning, MacIntyre and Gardner [21] attempted to describe its causes, and suggested the following model: "foreign language anxiety causes poor performance in the foreign language which produces elevations in the state anxiety" (p. 2). Young [35] also offers a wide list of the potential sources of language anxiety. In her article, she discusses the six sources of anxiety, some of which are associated with the learner, some with the teacher, and others with the instructional practice. She argues that language anxiety can arise from:

1. "personal and interpersonal anxieties,
2. learner beliefs about language learning,
3. instructor beliefs about language teaching,
4. instructor-learner actions,
5. classroom procedures, and
6. language testing." (p. 436)

Foreign language writing performance anxiety:

Writing is a demanding activity especially for learners of a second language /foreign language and it is a skill that they have to master in order to do well in courses especially at the university level of education [27]. Affective factors cannot be ignored when talking about writing because they may be a source of writing difficulties. Evidence has been gathered shows the promise of multidimensional conceptualizations of anxiety in investigating the effects of anxiety on different aspects of human behavior and intellectual performance [4]. Abdel Latif [1] defines it as "the feelings of uneasiness writers experience while performing the task" (p. 58). In recent decades a large number of studies have been done in the area of anxiety in second language learning. But few of them have undertaken the links between language anxiety and writing skill.

Ozturk and Cecen [24] in their study focused on portfolio keeping as a self-growth tool for reducing writing anxiety in an EFL setting. That study tried to fill the gap in studies on the effects of portfolio keeping on writing anxiety level of students. Fifteen participants from preparatory of English class language teaching department of a university in Istanbul participated in that study. Cheng's [6] Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) and four open-ended questions related to the students' background knowledge on the use of portfolio were the instruments. The study offered a new insight into positive effect of portfolio keeping that is reducing writing anxiety in second language. The causes of writing anxiety were resolved through the nature of portfolio. This study implied that prospective teachers should be provided with the opportunity to reflect on their feelings and attitudes toward writing in the target language.

Atay and Kurt [2] explore the effects of prospective teachers' writing anxiety on their teaching practices in L1 setting. They selected 85 Turkish prospective teachers of English. Data were collected by means of Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) developed by Cheng [6]. Results showed that more than half of the participating prospective teachers had high or average anxiety. The study also revealed that their writing experiences may affect their future teaching practices. Lack of experience, lack of skills, and lack of confidence are all cited as causes of anxiety for L2 writers. It can be said that, experience, practice, and success can effectively lead to less anxious writers.

*Method:**Participants:*

The study was conducted at Islamic Azad University of Dezful, Iran. One hundred and twenty male and female students participated in this research. They were chosen among 180 students studying at the B.A level majoring in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English language translation. Half of these students had passed all writing courses and another half had only passed one course in this skill. To ensure the students' linguistic homogeneity and to assess their general proficiency, they sat for a simulated language proficiency test. After the administration their scores were ranged from 21 to 68- their mean score was 43.58 and standard deviation was 11. Those students whose performances or marks were one standard deviation above the mean and one standard deviation below the mean were chosen for the study.

The test was a 75-item paper-based simulated proficiency Nelson test developed by Fowler and Coe [13], which its reliability was computed through KR-21 formula ($r=0.82$), was administrated. The proficiency test also indicated the level of the participants as intermediate since they learners who gained the scores on standard deviation above the mean were selected as the research sample. Two groups of low and high achievers were made based on the test of language proficiency and the number of writing courses they had passed. Each group of high (i.e., 30 males and 30 female) and low (i.e., 30 males and 30 female) totally comprised 120 intermediate learners. Generally, the groups were determined as: high achievers of males (A), high achievers of females (B), low achievers of males (C), and low achievers of females (D).

Instrumentation:

The following instruments were implemented in the study:

A) A simulated test of language proficiency [13] to make a distinction between low and high level students. As mentioned above, the test includes 75 items in the form of multiple-choice questions. Its reliability was computed through KR-21 formula as ($r=0.82$).

B) The second was a paragraph descriptive writing exam based on the TOEFL test of writing. This test consisted of 3 topics. Each of the students chose one of the subjects and began to write a paragraph. They were suggested not writing more than 200 words. The paragraphs were scored by two raters. Inter-rater reliability also was computed through KR-21 formula as ($r=0.78$).

C) The Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) developed by Cheng [6] to measure the extent to which the participants in the study feel anxious in relation to the writing skill (Appendix A). The questionnaire consisted of 22 items. Its options were used to choose the graded choices based on a five-point Likert scale. The items were positively worded; the higher the score, the higher the degree of writing anxiety. For example, for the item "while writing in English, I am not nervous at all"; I strongly disagree, I disagree, I have no strong feelings either way, I agree, and I strongly agree scoring from 1 to 5 respectively. The selection of "I strongly disagree" indicated the best example of high anxious person. It is worth mentioning that the reliability of the questionnaire was computed through KR-21 formula as ($r=0.79$).

Procedure:

In this study, the data was collected by means of the SLWAI questionnaire, a paragraph writing test which was based on the writing descriptive test of TOEFL, and the 75-item paper-based simulated proficiency Nelson test [13]. Those students whose scores on the proficiency test were one standard deviation above the mean and one standard deviation below the mean were chosen for the study. The writing achievement test based on the given topics (Appendix B) was also conducted at the end of the semester. Inter-rater reliability coefficient was assured in all the writing tests. Two raters corrected the compositions and scored them based on a scoring scale of TOEFL [29]. This scale focuses on the relevance of the sentences with topic and grammar; of course the style of writing was paid attention too, because as mentioned earlier, the test was a descriptive kind of writing. After writing a descriptive achievement test, they were asked to answer the SLWAI questionnaire. The questionnaire opened with a request to write down only their gender, age, and their semester. The questionnaire copies were coded to observe students' privacy. Data were recorded at the end of the questionnaire administration and the obtained scores were analyzed in order to clarify whether there was a relationship between their writing performance anxiety and their grades of achievement in the writing test and also gender differences and writing performance anxiety experienced by the students.

Data analysis:

The raw scores of 120 subjects from the anxiety scale and writing the descriptive paragraph were computed through appropriate measures; the Cheng's (2004) SLWAI scale for measuring writing anxiety and the TOEFL writing test scale [29] for measuring writing the descriptive paragraph were used and compiled for data analysis. Four statistical tests were used:

1. KR-21 formula was used to measure the reliability of writing tests and the questionnaire.

2. Two-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze the level of writing anxiety between male and female participants to see whether there was a significant difference between the groups. This test was also used to see whether there was a significant difference between low and high level students in terms of writing anxiety.
3. A Pearson Product-Moment Coefficient Correlation was used to determine the correlation between the level of writing anxiety and learners' writing performance on their writing achievement test scores.
4. An Independent *t*-test analysis was run to estimate the difference between male and female writing achievement mean scores among high and low achievers.

Results:

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for writing and anxiety, concerning eight groups of males and females maximum scores, minimum scores, means, standard deviations (SD), considering their level of competence. As shown in the table, there were considerable individual differences in demonstrated writing ability.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the Groups.

Groups	N	range	min	max	sum	means	St. Error	St. Deviation	Variance
High Female Anxiety	30	44.00	37.00	81.00	2,011.00	67.0333	1.8812	10.30394	106.171
High Male Writing	30	7.00	11.00	18.00	454.00	15.1333	0.3381	1.85199	3.430
High Female Writing	30	7.00	10.00	17.00	378.00	12.6000	0.4331	2.37225	5.628
LOW Female Anxiety	30	32.00	50.00	82.00	2,113.00	70.4333	1.4938	8.18191	66.944
LOW Male Anxiety	30	22.00	58.00	80.00	2,019.00	67.3000	1.1338	6.20984	38.562
LOW Female Writing	30	5.00	10.00	15.00	352.00	11.7333	0.2667	1.46059	2.133
LOW Male Writing	30	4.00	10.00	14.00	344.00	11.4667	0.2019	1.10589	1.223
Valid N (listwise)	30								

The mean scores of all groups were computed and presented in Table 1 separately. As it is seen, the mean of the anxiety for the high male achievers was 62.50, while for the high female achievers it was 67.03. In the case of low achievers, the mean of the anxiety for the low male achievers was 67.30, but for the low female ones, it was 70.43. In addition, the mean score for writing tests were also computed; for the high male achievers 15.13, while for the high female achievers, it was 12.60. The mean of writing for the low male achievers was 11.46, while for the low female ones, it was 11.73. Table 2 provides the information about writing and anxiety scores for males and females, separately without considering their level of competence.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for 4 Groups.

	N	Range	Min	Max	Sum	means	St. Error	St. Deviation	Variance
male anxiety	60	30	51	81	3,894	64.90	0.96	7.437	55.312
Female anxiety	60	45	37	82	4,124	68.73	1.21	9.382	88.029
Male writing	60	8	10	18	798	13.30	0.31	2.389	5.705
Female writing	60	7	10	17	730	12.17	0.26	2.001	4.006
Valid N (listwise)	60								

The students' scores in the writing test ranged from 10 to 18 out of 20 and the mean score for writing for males was 15.23 and for females was 12.60. The students' scores in the anxiety ranged from 37 to 81 out of 86 and the mean score was 62.50 for males and 67.03 for females (See Table 2). Immediately after the writing test, the subjects filled out the SLWAI by selecting the best responses. The possible range of scores was 32, indicating the lowest anxious person and 86, indicating the highest. The participants' scores ranged from 37 to 81 and the mean was 79 (See Table 1). A Pearson correlation was conducted on the subjects' scores to correlate the relationship between the anxiety and writing performance of the students. There was a negative correlation (-0.642) between writing performance anxiety and the ability to write in English for foreign language learners, implying that the relationship between the writing anxiety and the writing skill was significant at ($p < 0.05$). The two-way ANOVA was used to see whether there is a significant difference between the male and female students concerning the level of their writing anxiety. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Two-Way ANOVA of Male and Female Learners.

Independent variable: Gender			

Dependent variable: Anxiety					
Mean		R-Square	Coeff Var	anxiety	
66.81667		0.107871	12.38071	8.272375	
Source		N	DF ANOVA SS		Mean Square
F Value	Pr > F		1	440.8333333	440.8333333
gender	6.44 0.0125		1	504.3000000	504.3000000
level	7.37 0.0076		1	14.7000000	14.7000000
gender×level	0.21 0.6439	120	116	7938.133333	68.432184

Since the observed F (6.44) was greater than the critical F (3.92) differences between the male and female groups were considered significant. To understand the relationship between writing performance anxiety and the level of students' proficiency (i.e., low versus high achievers), an independent t -test was done in Table 4.

Table 4: Group Descriptive and Independent t -Test Statistics.

		Low & high		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Males anxiety		low		30	67.30	6.210	1.134
		high		30	62.50	7.877	1.438
t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
					Lower	Upper	
2.621	58	0.011	4.80	1.831	1.134	-2.878	
2.621	55.002	0.011	4.80	1.831	1.130	-2.875	

Table 4.5 shows that the difference between the anxiety level of high and low achievers was significant among male learners. Data analysis showed that the observed t (2.62) was greater than the critical t (2.00), rejecting the null hypothesis at the significant level ($p < 0.05$). These two groups were also compared based on the mean of their writing performance scores as it is illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5: Group Descriptive and Independent t -Test Statistics.

		Low vs. high		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Males writing		low		30	11.47	1.106	0.202
		high		30	15.13	1.852	0.338
t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
					Lower	Upper	
-9.310	58	0.000	-3.67	0.394	-4.455	9.273	
-9.310	47.348	0.000	-3.67	0.394	-4.459	9.280	

Table 5 shows that the difference between the writing performance of the high and low achievers was significant among male learners. Data analysis showed that observed t (9.31) was greater than the critical t (2.66), rejecting the null hypothesis at the significant level ($p < 0.05$). The analysis was done for the female students of the high and low groups. Considering the writing anxiety for this group the mean score was 67.30 for the high level females and 70.43 for low level females as presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Group Descriptive and Independent t -Test Statistics.

		Low vs. high		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Females anxiety		low		30	70.43	8.182	1.494
		high		30	67.03	10.304	1.881
t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
					Lower	Upper	
1.415	58	0.162	3.40	2.402	-1.408	0.151	
1.415	55.167	0.163	3.40	2.402	-1.414	0.156	

As revealed in the Table 6, the difference between the anxiety level of the high and low achievers, was not significant among the female learners. Data analysis showed that the observed t (1.41) was not greater than the critical t (1.671), so sustaining not the null hypothesis at the significant level ($p < 0.1$). The female groups were also compared based on their writing performance scores and the result was that the mean of the high level females writing scores was 12.60 and the mean of low level females writing scores was 11.73 as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Group Descriptive and Independent t -Test Statistics.

		Low & high		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Females writing		low		30	12.60	1.106	0.202
		high		30	11.73	1.852	0.338

		low	30	11.73	1.461	0.267
		high	30	12.60	2.372	0.433
t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
-1.704	58	0.094	-0.87	0.509	-1.885	-1.433
-1.704	48.224	0.095	-0.87	0.509	-1.889	-1.432

Table 7 shows that the difference between the writing performance of the high and low achievers was not significant among the female learners. That is, the observed t (1.70) was not greater than the critical t (2.66) thus sustaining the null hypothesis at the significant level ($p < 0.05$).

Discussion:

The research questions will be discussed as follows:

1. Does anxiety affect writing performance of intermediate students?:

One of the null hypotheses of this study was that anxiety does not affect the writing performance of intermediate students. The correlations between the different groups show that generally there is a negative relationship between anxiety and writing performance of students meaning that when anxiety increases, the performance of students become weaker. On the contrary, when the anxiety of students decreases, their ability on writing tests increases (Tables 1, 2, 3). These results prove the previous studies which claimed the effect of anxiety on the performance of the students. As an example, Young [34] reported a negative relationship between oral proficiency and anxiety.

2. Is there any relationship between writing performance anxiety and effective writing ability of male and female intermediate students?:

One of the null hypotheses of this study was that gender does not affect the level of writing anxiety in writing skill among intermediate students. To substantiate this question, a two-way ANOVA was calculated. The observed F was greater than the critical F , so it was revealed that there is a significant difference between the male and female amount of anxiety (Table 4). The mean score of anxiety for males was 64/90 and 68.73 for females, thus these scores also prove the difference between them. The mean score of anxiety of the females was higher than the males, implying that there is a significant difference in the degree of anxiety between the male and female. This part of study went in line with Padilla, Cervantes, Maldonado, and Garcia [20] who found that female students are more anxious and worry oriented than male students.

The second question was the relationship between students' writing ability and their level of anxiety. The degree of correlation which was found in this study between the students' scores in writing and SLWAI was -0.642. Bailey, Onweugbuzie and Daley [9] set out to conduct more research on anxiety and the foreign language learning process. Many of their results were supported by previous findings from their earlier research. Their research also showed that female students are more worried and anxious than male students. They found that what is often seen as a source of pressure and discomfort for female students may not be as nerve-racking for male students.

3. Is there any relationship between writing performance anxiety and the level of students' writing proficiency (i.e., low versus high achievers)?:

One of the aims of the present study was to see the relationship between writing anxiety and writing proficiency of the students. The results showed that generally, the high achievers performed better than low ones in writing test. Of course, the difference between the mean of the high and low male achievers' writing test was significant. This result went in line with Horwitz's [16] study that found high level learners perform better than low level learners in their achievement tests. In the case of female learners, the difference between the mean of writing test of female groups, meaning the high and low female achievers, was not significant. Although the high female achievers perform better than the low level female ones, their mean difference was not great. Another result gained from this study was that, generally the high achievers have lower level of writing anxiety than the low achievers. This result is also in line with Kim [18] and Horwitz's [16] study. They found that high level students show lower anxiety than low level ones during learning language. Particularly, the social prejudice against female behaviors forces them to adapt their behavior in order to not to write in the classroom until they are called on. As a result, different social roles have caused anxiety in males and females within and out of the classroom settings. Thus, it could be one reason females suffer more from anxiety. It was seen that some differences exist between men and women in terms of writing performance anxiety in the context of Iran. Based on the results of the study, in the context of Iran generally men perform better than women in their writing tests and show less anxiety during the test than them.

Conclusion:

Writing is one of the central elements of communication. It is a very important source of output in language learning. Writing is a complex process involving many aspects. In EFL teaching, it is an aspect that needs special attention and instruction. In order to provide effective instruction, it is necessary for teachers of EFL to carefully examine the factors, conditions, and components that underlie writing effectiveness.

One of these factors is a close attention to affective side of learners among them anxiety plays an important role. In addition, in EFL classes, gender does influence the anxiety level of boys and girls differently.

When compared with other fundamental skills such as listening, speaking and reading, writing is the most difficult skill because it requires writers to have a great deal of lexical and syntactic knowledge as well as principles of organization in L2 to produce a good writing. In language learning writing is a very important source of output which is social and interactive rather than simply cognitive and individual. As regards skills in language learning, to write fluently, coherently, and appropriately in the target language is considered the most difficult skill to acquire. Writing is a complex process involving cognitive (linguistic competence for composing), metacognitive (awareness of purpose, audience, and style), social (being communicative and interactive with the target readers), and affective (being expressive of feelings as well as ideas) factors. The first step to take in order to overcome students' anxiety is to detect its presence among our students and diagnose which are the most influential causes of this variable in the classroom context. Language class anxiety according to Gardner and MacIntyre [21] is the best predictor of final grades for foreign language students.

Implications for teaching English as a foreign language:

The results of the present study emphasize the integrative nature of the L2 writing skill. The students with low English linguistic knowledge were found to have higher writing anxiety due to their low language ability and poor writing achievement. The instructional practices those students have been exposed to, should not be ignored as well. Teachers need to help those students overcome their negative English writing affect adopting comprehensive approaches to teaching writing that could meet their strategic, linguistic and psychological needs.

A language teacher dealing with anxious students should be aware that anxious students may underestimate their ability so teachers should provide opportunities for them to raise their level of motivation and effort to participate in the classroom writing assignments. The results of this study suggest that some students are at risk of having debilitating levels of foreign language anxiety, especially female ones. So language instructors not only should be aware of existence of anxiety in the classroom but also identify at-risk students. They should also try to explore and implement methods and techniques in their classroom in order to mitigate anxiety in their students. As Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope [27] mention, language teachers have two options in order to overcome foreign language anxiety: (1) help at-risk students to cope with the anxiety provoking situations, and (2) make learning context less stressful. Teachers should acknowledge that these feelings are legitimate and they are not the only ones who suffer from writing anxiety and then try to lessen students' feelings of inadequacy, confusion and failure by providing positive experiences to counteract the anxiety.

Moreover, teachers can confront the students' misbeliefs by providing them with complete and accurate information regarding the course goals. They can also build the students' confidence and self-esteem in their foreign language ability by encouraging them, reinforcing and empathy. Teachers should make it known that classroom is a place to make mistakes and making mistakes is a natural phenomena in order to make progress. Teachers also should announce that the only way to learn to write English is writing even if they make mistakes. Teachers should be careful while correcting students' errors. Teachers' expectations toward students should be realistic. Teachers can also discuss the nature of anxiety in the classroom. By doing these students become sure that they are not the only ones who have this negative feeling. That second language learning is associated with making mistakes is a fact. We make progress only by learning from our mistakes. If we never volunteer to write a sentence until we are completely certain of its correctness, we will never be able to communicate in the language we want to learn. Motivation is influenced by student's self-concepts, values, needs, and goals. To attain and sustain high motivation in class the teacher should be responsive to individual differences and the ways in which each student present motivation.

Potential questions for further research:

In addition to important implications and recommendations for foreign language teachers, this study also suggests areas which need further research. Room seems to exist for a thorough examination of the relationship between mother-tongue and foreign-language abilities, or of cognitive mechanisms that influence achievements in foreign language. There is a need for an extensive study that will include different variables like mother-tongue abilities, general cognitive abilities, and language anxiety, of course, which will be measured by the FLCAS questionnaire. Such a study will be able to point out the relevant reasons for difficulties in foreign language, and this way it will be easier to draw conclusions about ways to improve foreign-language teaching. It

will solve real problems that make this learning and teaching so difficult. Relationship between teacher's foreign language anxiety and how it might impact actual classroom instruction could be a good topic for future investigation. This study did not investigate how severity levels of writing anxiety was correlated with learner other variables such as age and self-rating of writing ability.

Limitations of the study:

Some limitations to this study must be noted. First, the study was based on a sample of 120 Iranian students learning English in one university in the spring and summer semesters of 2009. The number of the subjects who participated in the study was small in size for justifying a generalization about all Iranian students learning English in Iran. Second, the allocated time for the researcher from the responsible in university was limited; therefore the he had to perform his study in certain few days. In addition, since a self-reported measure instrument was used in this study (SLWAI), the results depend on subjects' ability and willingness to respond accurately to items.

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Appendixes:

Appendix A: Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (Cheng, 2004):

Read the statements below very carefully. For each statement, among the choices 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 circle the most suitable one for you. As the findings of this test are going to be used in for research, we kindly request you be honest while answering the questions.

1. I strongly disagree
 2. I disagree
 3. I have no strong feelings either way
 4. I agree
 5. I strongly agree
1. While writing in English, I am not nervous at all.
1 2 3 4 5
 2. I feel my heart pounding when I write English compositions under time constraint.
1 2 3 4 5
 3. While writing English compositions, I feel worried and uneasy if I know they will be evaluated.
1 2 3 4 5
 4. I often choose to write down my thoughts in English.
1 2 3 4 5
 5. I usually do my best to avoid writing English compositions.
1 2 3 4 5
 6. My mind often goes blank when I start to work on an English composition.
1 2 3 4 5
 7. I don't worry that my English compositions are a lot worse than others.
1 2 3 4 5
 8. I tremble or perspire when I write English compositions under time pressure.
1 2 3 4 5
 9. If my English composition is to be evaluated, I would worry about getting a very poor grade.
1 2 3 4 5
 10. I do my best to avoid situations in which I have to write in English.
1 2 3 4 5
 11. My thoughts become jumbled when I write English compositions under time constraint.
1 2 3 4 5
 12. Unless I have no choice, I would not use English to write compositions.
1 2 3 4 5

