

“I'm Afraid My Thesis Has Many Mistakes”: Thesis Writing Anxiety, Its Contributing Factors, and Alleviating Strategies

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ABSTRACT

The present study intends to investigate the possible contributing factors of thesis writing anxiety and the possible strategies that could be taken to help reduce thesis writing anxiety. For these purposes, this study conducted interviews with six Indonesian learners of English in English language departments and two Indonesian English lecturers who were thesis advisors. From Thematic Analysis, this study found two factors contributing to learners' anxiety. These were perceived inability to express ideas in good English writing and getting negative evaluations from their respective thesis advisor. Furthermore, three strategies were believed by both learners and advisors to help reduce learners' thesis writing anxiety. These were using grammar checker tools to improve writing quality and learn grammar, reading journal articles to improve learners' mastery of the research topic, and creating a positive atmosphere of consultation sessions. Based on the findings, it is suggested, among others, that exposure to various academic texts and the use of grammar in academic contexts should be increased earlier in the curricula. Thesis advisors are also encouraged to show support and instil optimism. Contributions of this study are stated alongside several suggested directions for future studies.

KEYWORDS:

English Language Education; Factors; Strategies; thematic analysis; thesis writing anxiety

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Introduction

Anxiety in second/foreign language (L2) settings is considered distinct and different from general anxieties (Horwitz et al., 1986) and over the years researchers investigated several language anxiety constructs such as speaking anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Subekti, 2018; Tran, 2012), which is perhaps the most widely researched to date, listening anxiety (Chriswiyati & Subekti, 2022; Dalman, 2016; Liu & Thondhlana, 2015), reading anxiety (Al-Shboul et al., 2013; Limeranto & Subekti, 2021; Saito et al., 1999; Sparks et al.,

2018), and writing anxiety (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011; Cheng, 2004; Jebreil et al., 2015).

Though perhaps the least researched construct among other L2 anxiety constructs, writing anxiety is no less important (Cheng, 2004). Writing anxiety is a constant feeling of not being good enough to write or not being ready to write (Jawas, 2019). This feeling could negatively impact L2 writing performance (Hartono & Maharani, 2020; Sabti et al., 2019). Perhaps due to this possible detrimental effect on L2 writing achievement, more researchers are interested in investigating this field in several different L2 learning contexts, for instance, in Turkiye (Kara, 2013), Afghanistan (Miri & Joia, 2018), Oman (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011), Jordan (Rabadi & Rabadi, 2020), India (Jennifer & Ponniah, 2017), and Indonesia (Dwihandini et al., 2013; Loppies, 2020; Salikin, 2019). These aforementioned studies may imply the urgency of investigating L2 writing anxiety considering the possible negative impacts it has on L2 writing achievement.

Studies about writing anxiety have suggested that writing anxiety can be triggered by internal factors, referring to factors within learners themselves, and external factors. A study involving 30 international postgraduate learners from China at a Malaysian university suggested that perceived lack of mastery of academic writing topic made learners anxious (Cancan et al., 2022). Furthermore, quite numerous studies reported that L2 learners tended to feel anxious in writing when they felt they did not have sufficient mastery of grammar and vocabulary (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011; Dwihandini et al., 2013; Fakeye & Ohia, 2016; Moses & Mohamad, 2019; Quvanch & Na, 2022; Yayli & Genc, 2019). Studies by Yayli and Genc (2019) in Turkiye and Miri and Joia (2018) in Afghanistan found that poor grammar knowledge was the primary source of L2 writing anxiety. In Iraq, learners' difficulties in the selection of vocabulary or grammar and the organisation of ideas instilled anxiety in L2 writing. In an Omani context, a study involving 90 L2 teachers of English by Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam (2011) reported the teacher participants' beliefs

that learners, despite knowing the English grammar rules, could not apply them in their language, including written production. Some studies reported this particular issue as a trigger for writing anxiety among L2 learners at undergraduate level (Alharbi, 2019; Altinmakas & Bayyurt, 2019; El Shimi, 2017; Kara, 2013; Kristiana et al., 2021; Loppies, 2020; Toba et al., 2019). For example, a study in Turkiye found that some learners experienced writing anxiety because they could not express their ideas through writing (Kara, 2013). Similarly, a quantitative study involving 74 Saudi Arabian learners of English by Alharbi (2019) found that learners face difficulties expressing their ideas due to insufficient knowledge of how to express ideas in well-written paragraphs in English. A study in India by Jennifer and Ponniah (2017) also found that learners with moderate and higher anxiety levels found it challenging to transfer their ideas from their native language into English. In addition, a survey study involving 260 Indonesian L2 learners by Salikin (2019) found a combination of conditions instilling anxiety, and these were a lack of mastery of writing techniques, a lack of knowledge about topics to be discussed in writing, and a lack of practice in L2 writing. These studies may suggest that perceived lack of mastery in grammar and vocabulary tended to make learners feel anxious in writing.

Apart from internal factors, external factors from learners' environment were also reported to affect writing anxiety (Jawas, 2019; Kusumaningputri et al., 2018; Sabti et al., 2019; Wahyuni & Umam, 2017). In Indonesia, some studies revealed that lecturers and classmates could influence the writing class atmosphere, which in turn could affect writing anxiety (Jawas, 2019; Wahyuni & Umam, 2017). In Egypt, a study by El Shimi (2017) reported that learners were afraid to share what they wrote with their peers. This finding was similar to the findings of several subsequent studies (Kusumaningputri et al., 2018; Quvanch & Na, 2022; Sabti et al., 2019). Furthermore, studies in Jordan and Taiwan also reported that fear of making mistakes and their work being negatively evaluated by lecturers made learners feel anxious in writing (Rabadi

& Rabadi, 2020; Tsao et al., 2017). Similar to this finding, an earlier study in Indonesia by Loppies (2016) also reported that if learners saw many mistakes in their writing, they may experience anxiety because they feared getting a lot of 'unwanted' overwhelming comments or feedback from their teachers. These aforementioned studies being said, it can be seen that learners' fear of negative evaluation from both peers and teachers could hamper their learning of writing. Hence, the conditions that instilling such fear should be minimised. A study in China suggested that peer- and self-evaluation could be occasionally conducted to reduce excessive feedback from teachers, which could make learners even more anxious (Zhang, 2011).

Furthermore, several studies reported conditions that could help alleviate writing anxiety. Jawas (2019) found that staying focused and calm in L2 writing situations helped learners to work on their tasks. A study by Yayli and Genc (2019) reported that learners mostly used strategies in the planning stage of writing. They tried to expand their vocabulary knowledge, researched the possible writing topic, and practised the most commonly used writing strategies. This suggested that teachers should give learners more writing practice. This practice opportunity could be used to deal with grammar and vocabulary problems that learners often experienced in writing (Hartono & Maharani, 2020). This is attributed to the idea that the more learners are exposed to writing, the more familiar with it they become. And as they are getting familiar with L2 writing, their anxiety can be reduced. Related to this idea, a qualitative study in Pakistan by Fareed et al. (2021) found that learners experienced writing anxiety due to not developing reading habits, suggesting that L2 writing achievement is closely related to L2 reading achievement. That is perhaps due to learners' reading ability affecting their ability to generate ideas for writing (El Shimi, 2017). The more they read, the more likely they obtain more information based on which they could develop ideas for writing.

Furthermore, studies also suggested that teachers played a paramount role in affecting how learners perceive L2 writing and their writing ability. On a

positive note, getting positive feedback from teachers made learners feel they were 'able' and this reduced anxiety in writing as well as increased their motivation (Tsao et al., 2017). Such feedback was reported to increase learners' perceived writing competence as well (Miri & Joia, 2018). It was also reported that teachers providing clear feedback and allocating more time for writing courses and the writing process made learners more relaxed in their writing class (Yayli & Genc, 2019). By being given ample time to prepare their writing, learners may have more time to use technological resources to help improve the quality of their writing and learn the grammatical aspects of it as well (Bailey, 2019; Jalok & Idris, 2020; Park, 2019). They could also use the opportunity to read some sources to master their writing topic (El Shimi, 2017).

The aforementioned studies on L2 writing anxiety and the related fields suggest that investigation on this topic is not new. However, the plethora of research studies on L2 writing anxiety has thus far been overwhelmingly investigating writing anxiety in typical L2 writing classes, with such tasks as paragraph or short essay writing. Fewer studies have specifically been conducted in the area of anxiety in writing theses in English (Dwihandini et al., 2013; Harahap & Syarif, 2022), herein referred to as thesis writing anxiety. In fact, with English language departments necessitate learners to complete theses to graduate, thesis writing could likely become a spectre even for learners who study English as their major. Diasti and Mbato (2020) mentioned that some learners took a long time to finish their studies and this was attributed to the very long process of completing their theses, suggesting theses as a big challenge for learners. With a thesis being understandably more complicated than most writing tasks in typical L2 classes, learners taking a thesis likely experience anxiety more than they do in typical writing tasks they have previously. Thus, it may be paramount to conduct an investigation delving into learners' thesis writing anxiety, the contributing factors, and the possible alleviating strategies.

The Preceding Study

The present study was the continuation of the preceding survey study involving 105 Indonesian learners of English studying at English language education departments at ten universities in six different provinces in Indonesia (Kawengian & Subekti, 2023). The study revealed that in general, learners reported a moderate level of thesis writing anxiety. Nonetheless, their anxiety was particularly high in the aspects of language expressions and grammar. Whilst some learners expressed their anxiety about their theses being judged negatively by peers, more learners expressed their anxiety about obtaining negative evaluations from their advisors. Informed by some findings of this preceding study, the present study involved not only learners but also thesis advisors in an investigation aiming to delve into details contributing factors of thesis writing anxiety as well as strategies to help alleviate it.

That being said, this study seeks to answer the following questions. First, what are the possible factors contributing to learners' thesis writing anxiety? And second, what strategies do learners and thesis advisors believe may help reduce learners' thesis writing anxiety?

Method

Research Design

The present study used a qualitative design and employed semi-structured interviews to gather the data. Interviews are employed to examine the feelings and attitudes of participants regarding a certain issue or phenomenon (Gray, 2014). Interviewing also intends to understand the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2013), and in this study, the experience regarded thesis writing anxiety. Considering that this study is a follow-up from a previous quantitative study employing a survey method, as a whole, our investigation of thesis writing anxiety could also be regarded as a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative (Creswell, 2014; McKim, 2017).

The instrument used in the present study was an interview checklist consisting of several questions on areas that needed probing (Gray, 2014). An example of the interview checklist for learners includes "Your advisor will check your thesis. What do you feel about this?" An example of an interview checklist for thesis advisors includes, "What are the possible strategies to deal with the worries and fears (writing anxiety) experienced by learners in writing a thesis in English?"

Participants and Setting

A total of 105 Indonesian L2 learners from English Education departments from ten different universities participated in our preceding quantitative study. They filled out a ten-item Likert-scale questionnaire. For each item, the score ranged from 1 to 5, making the possible range of 10-50 for the ten items. Based on the total scores, their anxiety level could be determined in which the 10-25 range was categorised as low anxiety, 26-35 as moderate anxiety, and 36-50 as high anxiety. For the present study, six learner participants were selected based on their anxiety levels to be interviewed. These participants were selected from the questionnaire data where they indicated their willingness to be invited for possible follow-up interviews. Of the six participants, two were from the low anxiety group, two from the moderate anxiety group, and the other two from the high anxiety group, regardless of their home institutions. They happened to be all females and come from five different universities, three private universities, and two state universities.

Two thesis advisors from English departments at two different universities in Java also participated in this study. Two advisors were involved to provide possibly more various views on the issue of thesis writing anxiety. They were selected on a convenience basis, meaning the recruiting process of the lecturer participants were largely based on our easy access to these participants. Of these participants, one is a lecturer of English with a doctorate and the other one with a Master's degree. They both had thesis advisory experiences of at least two years and had published at least one research

article in a reputable journal and thus could be considered to have a relatively good command of both advising novice researchers and academic writing. Involving thesis advisors in an investigation of thesis writing anxiety, at least in the Indonesian context, could be considered a breakthrough as previous studies in the field largely focused on learners, leaving thesis advisors' roles largely under-explored.

Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews were conducted in the Indonesian language, online via *Zoom* and *Google Meet*. Interviews with the learners were from 29 March to 31 March 2023 whilst those with the thesis advisors were from 12-13 April 2023. Each interview lasted around 20-30 minutes. Interviews with the learners aimed to investigate possible factors contributing to their thesis writing anxiety as well as possible strategies that could help alleviate it. Interviews with the advisors focused on trying to find the possible strategies for alleviating learners' anxiety from advisors' viewpoints.

Upon the completion of all the interviews, the interview data were transcribed and translated into English. The data were then analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) per the research questions of this study. The following is the sequence of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first was to familiarise ourselves with the dataset and this was done through reading and re-reading the data. Then, initial codes were generated. From these codes, possible themes could be formulated. These possible themes were then reviewed where it was possible to add themes, revise or even drop the existing themes. Furthermore, we reformulated or defined themes best representing the whole data set per the research questions. These steps were done by making separate notes and annotating the English transcription documents. Furthermore, the interview excerpts best representing the defined themes were selected for the report to be analysed further. To maintain trustworthiness of the interview data, we self-assess and minimise areas of possible biases. That was to enhance objectivity

(Adler, 2022). Then, we conducted member-checking where participants provided feedback to the analyses of the interview data.

Ethical Consideration

This study adhered to research ethics. Of 105 participants in the preceding survey study, 53 indicated their willingness to be interviewed. The six interview participants were selected not only based on their anxiety levels but also based on their willingness to be interviewed. This suggested the implementation of the autonomy principle where ones have the freedom to participate in a study voluntarily without any coercion (Hammersley, 2015; Israel & Hay, 2006). Furthermore, before each interview, an interview consent form was provided and it detailed the aims of the study, the researchers' identity, and what the participants were expected to do if they decided to participate in the study (Davis & Lachlan, 2017). This study also maintained the confidentiality of the participants (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). No exact names of the universities involved in this study were revealed. Whilst we know the actual names of the interview participants, all the data reported were made anonymous and initials were used throughout this report.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are largely reported in the form of verbatim excerpts. To facilitate easier tracing and clearer presentation of data, the following codes are used: Low = Low Anxiety, Moderate = Moderate Anxiety, and High = High Anxiety. The following initials were used for the six learner participants: IK, PJ, ER, AN, DM, and NA. The initials for the two thesis advisors were PC and PE. For example, “[IK/low, 29 March 2023, 00:20:01]” after an excerpt indicates that the excerpt was from IK, a learner with a low thesis writing anxiety, interviewed on 29 March 2023. The findings per the research questions are elaborated on in the following sections.

Possible Factors Contributing to Learners' Thesis Writing Anxiety

Interviews with six learners from three different anxiety categories (low, moderate, and high) produced two recurring themes on factors contributing to their thesis writing anxiety. These themes can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. The Possible Factors Contributing to Learners' Thesis Writing Anxiety

Theme 1	Not being able to express ideas through writing in English caused writing anxiety.
Theme 2	Fear of negative evaluation from thesis advisors during consultations made learners anxious.

Theme 1. Not being able to express ideas through writing in English caused writing anxiety.

Three learners reported that they were anxious because they did not always know how to write what they wanted to write in good English writing. They stated:

"Maybe when translating (what is in my mind) into English, I can't express the words or ideas I have in my mind well..." [DM/ high, 30 March 2023, 00: 15:03]

"... I cannot express my ideas (about my thesis) in writing because I find it difficult to put them into English, making me afraid to develop my words." [PJ/moderate, 31 March 2023, 00; 12:09]

"... This (writing a thesis) is not as easy as I imagined because grammar, vocabulary, and others can cause anxiety and fear. [AN/moderate, 30 March 2023, 00: 01:15]

As seen from the interview excerpts, learners seemed to be worried because they perceived themselves to be unable to write what was in their minds into their theses. This finding aligned with the finding of a study in Turkiye by Kara (2013) involving 150 learners. The study reported that the

perceived inability in expressing ideas in written form was associated with writing anxiety. In general L2 writing context, some other studies also suggested that some learners could not generate or develop their ideas into writing (Kristiana et al., 2021; Miri & Joia, 2018; Toba et al., 2019). Similarly, in India, a study by Jennifer and Ponniah (2017) involving 18 learners at the university level found that learners with moderate and higher anxiety levels found it challenging to transfer their ideas from their native language into English.

Furthermore, from the excerpts, it also seemed that learners were unable to express their ideas in English due to a rather limited vocabulary and lack of grammar. As one of the participants (AN/moderate) mentioned in the interview, she felt anxiety and fear because she found it challenging to write a thesis due to a lack of grammar and limited vocabulary. Related to this, a study in Afghanistan by Miri and Joia (2018) reported that low writing skills, inappropriate grammatical structure, and insufficient vocabulary knowledge have been the primary reasons for learners' writing anxiety.

As seen from these studies, linguistic factors were reported to cause anxiety in writing thesis. This could inform the developers of curricula of English language departments to strengthen learners' development of grammar and vocabulary in contexts as well as increase academic exposure to academic reading and writing early and more extensively in their respective curricula.

Theme 2. Fear of negative evaluation from thesis advisors during consultations made learners anxious.

Three learner participants expressed that they were particularly anxious due to fear of obtaining negative evaluations from their thesis advisors during consultation sessions. Regarding this, DM and AN stated:

“...What made me anxious most was that I was afraid that I would get a lot of revisions and (the content of my thesis) would be questioned by my thesis advisors.” [DM/high, 30 March 2023, 00: 20: 05]

“...Thankfully, I have a good thesis advisor compared to other lecturers who may be more perfectionists, so my friends experience anxiety when going to consultations and I am not that anxious.” [AN/moderate, 29 March 2023, 00:19: 18]

From the excerpts, it can be seen that consultation sessions seemed to be a spectre for some learners as they were afraid of negative evaluations from their advisors. Though conducted in general L2 writing contexts, several studies also suggested that negative evaluations from teachers on learners' written work instilled their anxiety (Loppies, 2020; Rabadi & Rabadi, 2020; Sabti et al., 2019; Tsao et al., 2017). For instance, a study by Sabti et al. (2019) involving 100 Iraqi undergraduate learners majoring in the English language found that negative evaluation by teachers was the most crucial element that caused writing anxiety.

Furthermore, ER commented that she was afraid of being questioned about her thesis progress and of being poorly commented on by her thesis advisor. She said:

“I have fear and anxiety because the lecturer will examine it (the content of my thesis). I'm afraid my thesis has many mistakes...” [ER/Moderate, 31 March 2023, 00:15:05]

In line with ER's comments, a study in Indonesia by Loppies (2016) also reported that learners tended to be anxious as they feared that their teachers would give many comments or unwanted feedback if they saw many mistakes in their writing. A study in Jordan by Rabadi and Rabadi (2020) involving 684 first-year L2 learners of English from a medical department also found that the

primary factor increasing learners' L2 writing anxiety was negative evaluations by their language teachers.

This finding suggested that consultation sessions have a paramount role in affecting the success of learners' thesis completion. From the part of learners, they need to be more prepared so that during the consultations they could optimally show their progress to their respective advisors. They may also prepare questions and share any difficulties they may face with their advisors. Some learners may also need to shift their paradigm of seemingly seeing consultation sessions as 'judgment' time to seeing the sessions as opportunities to obtain input for their theses. Though conducted in the field of speaking anxiety, a study by Subekti (2018) reported that learners felt more relaxed when they saw their teachers as caring and supportive. Informed by the finding of this previous study as well, from the part of the advisors, thesis advisors may also convey their feedback in such a way that learners feel supported rather than being continuously assessed.

Strategies that may help reduce learners' thesis writing anxiety

To find the possible strategies that could alleviate learners' thesis writing anxiety, interviews were conducted with six learners and two thesis advisors as the participants. This study found three recurring themes regarding this and the themes can be observed in Table 2.

Table 2. Strategies that Learners and Thesis Advisors Believed May Help Reduce Learners' Thesis Writing Anxiety

Theme 1.	Using existing tools to learn grammar helped learners reduce writing anxiety.
Theme 2.	Reading journal articles helped learners write a thesis in English.
Theme 3.	Creating a positive atmosphere during consultations could reduce learners' thesis writing anxiety.

Theme 1. Using existing tools to learn grammar helped learners reduce writing anxiety.

One of the strategies to help learners reduce their writing anxiety was using existing tools to improve the language accuracy of learners' theses and to learn grammar. Regarding this, DM mentioned:

"... I might do my thesis outside the house to find a new atmosphere, listen to music, and then use tools to help me write my thesis to ensure my writing is accurate (in terms of grammar)." [DM/High, 30 March 2023, 00:25:20]

What DM mentioned was also mentioned by the two thesis advisors. They stated:

"... In terms of grammar, learners can perhaps use a (grammar checker) tool to check their grammar and learn from there. So, the anxiety about mastering grammar can be reduced." [PE, 12 April 2023, 00:28:08]

"[.....] I recommend my students to use Grammarly (a tool) to check their grammar which they can easily buy on various E-commerce." [PC, 13 April 2023, 00:27:05]

These excerpts suggested that through the use of tools to check the grammar accuracy of learners' theses, learners could improve the language quality of their theses and this could help reduce their writing anxiety especially that associated with perceived insufficiency of grammar knowledge. Several studies suggested that Artificial Intelligence-based grammar checkers helped learners check for any possible language errors in their written work and to produce more accurate grammar (Bailey, 2019; Jalok & Idris, 2020; Park, 2019). A study in Korea by Bailey (2019) further found that online writing tools can help L2 learners who experienced writing anxiety. Considering this finding of the study, it could be a good idea to introduce L2

learners to various writing tools such as grammar checkers early on in their academic writing classes before they take their theses. This way, they would be equipped to do informed and responsible decisions regarding the use of technology to aid them in writing theses.

Theme 2. Reading journal articles helped learners write a thesis in English.

A learner and a thesis advisor mentioned that reading journal articles facilitated learners to be more capable of writing theses and thus it could reduce their anxiety. IK and PC commented:

“The language of theses is more academic. Reading journal (articles) and theses of our seniors can be calming and make me less anxious.” [IK/Low, 29 March 2023, 00:13:45]

“... and when someone hasn't finished their revision, I'll give them some feedback and encourage them to read journal articles.” [PC, 13 April 2023, 00:16:35]

As seen from the interview excerpts, it can be seen that learners need to read journal articles for references to be able to finish writing their theses. Though in this study, it may not be immediately salient how reading journal articles could decrease learners' writing anxiety, the excerpts may give some kind of support that as learners read more articles, they master their theses more, and this mastery could lead to them being less anxious. A study by Miri and Joia (2018) involving Afghan English language learners also found that reading various texts was a strategy to reduce writing anxiety. In line with that, a study in Pakistan by Fareed et al. (2021) reported that learners who did not develop a reading habit tended to have lower proficiency and to be more anxious about writing, suggesting that learners need to read to be able to comfortably write better. This necessity to read could be particularly higher in the case of thesis writing because writing a thesis requires not only complex

language production but also mastery of the research topic which could be gained, among others, through reading various research articles on the topic.

Theme 3: Creating a positive atmosphere during consultations could reduce learners' thesis writing anxiety.

Two learner participants, IK and AN, commented that a positive atmosphere during consultation sessions reduced their writing anxiety. Regarding this, they stated:

"I'm grateful to have a good thesis advisor, so when I'm consulting (my thesis), I'm more excited because my thesis advisor is very helpful." [IK/Low, 29 March 2023, 00:17:22]

"... I don't feel scared but rather excited (attending consultation sessions) because I have many questions about my thesis progress. I always prepare many questions and work on my thesis, so I have nothing to fear." [AN/Moderate, 29 March 2023, 00: 20:10]

The aforementioned excerpts suggested that to create a positive atmosphere during consultation sessions, both learners and advisors had their respective roles to play. Learners needed to study their theses beforehand and to find aspects about which they found difficulties as things to ask their advisors. Likewise, the thesis advisors should be supportive in helping learners in the areas they were confused about and instil optimism. Regarding this, one advisor participant commented:

"... I believe participating in consultations should not be anxiety-provoking because (in the consultations) thesis advisors can help learners find solutions for their thesis progress." [PE, 12 April 2023, 00:13:20]

This finding also suggested that learners needed to take advantage of corrective feedback given by their teachers on their work, which was similar to a finding of a study involving 158 Taiwanese L2 learners by (Tsao et al., 2017). Learners may also need to begin to see corrective feedback not necessarily as a 'negative' evaluation of their writing performance as this may make them anxious. In this case, thesis advisors should also make sure that their feedback was clear and easy to understand. This would enable learners to attend to the feedback successfully. Related to this, a study by Yayli and Genc (2019) found that providing clear feedback can reduce learners' writing anxiety. In comparison, unclear feedback may be tricky to attend to and learners' inability to attend to advisors' feedback may instil fear of having thesis consultation sessions further hindering the completion of the task. Positive feedback and comments by teachers could help students improve their writing ability (Miri & Joia, 2018).

Conclusion

Important points from this study can be highlighted as follows. Continuing a preceding quantitative study involving 105 learners taking a thesis, the present study interviewed six selected learner participants and two thesis advisors. From the learner interview data, this study found two factors contributing to learners' thesis writing anxiety. They were learners' perceived inability to express ideas in good writing and fear of negative evaluations from their respective thesis advisors. From the learner and advisor interview data, this study found three strategies that could reduce learners' thesis writing anxiety. They were using grammar checker tools to improve the language quality of theses, reading journal articles to master the research topic better, and creating a positive atmosphere during consultation sessions.

This study contributes to a more thorough understanding of thesis writing anxiety phenomenon which was thus far rather under-research compared to L2 writing anxiety in typical language classes. As in the process of thesis

completion, learners closely work with their respective advisors, the role of advisors in positively or negatively affecting learners' writing anxiety could be paramount. Hence, the advisors' perspectives in this study may give unique insights into the phenomenon.

This study has several implications. First, the finding suggesting that learners had difficulty expressing what was in their mind in their theses indirectly advocates the teaching of grammar in context, for example, academic context, early in their study at English language departments. Second, thesis advisors should be supportive towards learners and ensure that consultation sessions become an opportunity that learners to look forward to obtaining helpful feedback rather than situation learners are nervous about. Furthermore, exposing learners to various academic texts, especially journal articles early in the language education curricula could also help familiarise learners towards reading academic texts and research studies. This could be a stepping stone for their success in completing their respective thesis, both in terms of the writing and the research aspects of it.

Furthermore, suggestions for future studies are as follows. Researchers could investigate the thesis writing anxiety phenomenon involving thesis advisors in a large-scale quantitative study. The findings of such a study would have a possibility of generalisation, unlike the findings of this study, which could be unique in its context. Thesis consultation sessions also seemed largely unexplored in L2 learning literature. Aspects other than (or along with) writing anxiety could be more thoroughly explored in this context, for example, feedback, motivation, and strategies. Finally, researching thesis writing anxiety with learners' journals of thesis progress as one of the sources of data could potentially offer insights into the dynamic of learners' affect and emotions in the process of completing their theses.

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