Academic Writing Anxiety and Coping Strategies of EFL Postgraduate Students at a Thai University

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate symptoms and causes of academic writing anxiety among Thai postgraduate students of English as a foreign language, as well as the strategies that students use to cope with academic writing anxiety. The participants were 30 postgraduate students majoring in English in a Master of Arts (MA) program at a Thai university. The primary research instruments used in this study were the Academic Writing Anxiety Inventory (AWAI) and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative results revealed that cognitive anxiety emerged as the highest category. Additionally, the data indicated that a lack of topical knowledge was the most significant source of academic writing anxiety among the participants. The qualitative results demonstrated the participants' perceptions of academic writing and their strategies to cope with anxiety during the academic writing process. These strategies can be categorized into four main groups: seeking support from others, taking breaks or pausing during the writing process, adopting a positive mindset, and employing cognitive strategies such as effective time management. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges associated with writing anxiety in a graduate context.

Keywords: writing anxiety, academic writing, EFL learners, postgraduate students, Thai university

Introduction

Academic writing stands out as particularly complex among the different types of writing. Unlike other forms of writing, academic writing requires a formal tone, a well-organized structure, and a logical flow of ideas. According to Bailey (2014), academic writing serves two primary purposes: to report on completed research and to discuss topics from the writer's perspective. It also reflects a student's comprehension of learning materials, the ability to generate new ideas, and the application of knowledge. These characteristics make academic writing a vital skill for success in higher education, where students are expected to demonstrate their intellectual abilities through various forms of written work. These increased expectations can frequently

lead to writing anxiety among students, as they face growing pressure to meet academic standards at higher levels of education.

In Thailand, academic writing plays a central role in university programs. Many universities require postgraduate students to publish at least one research paper in a national or international journal as a graduation requirement (Rungruangthum, 2011). For instance, at Khon Kaen University, postgraduate students across all disciplines must fulfill this requirement to obtain their degrees. This publication requirement places additional pressure on students, particularly those who are not native speakers of English. Publishing in international journals often involves meeting strict linguistic and academic standards, which can be challenging for EFL learners.

The challenges associated with academic writing can be exacerbated by anxiety. Anxiety can cause both positive and negative impacts on language learning. Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) explained that anxiety in writing tasks can cause cognitive resources to be depleted, even among competent students. When students are overwhelmed by anxiety, they may struggle to organize their thoughts, recall vocabulary, or adhere to grammatical rules, resulting in poor-quality writing. This is especially problematic in the setting of academic writing, where precision, clarity, and coherence are essential. Moreover, anxiety is often cited as one of the primary barriers to successful writing in a second or foreign language, making it a critical issue that requires further investigation (Cheng, 2002; Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004). Addressing the writing anxiety is essential to improving both academic performance and overall well-being.

Although numerous studies have explored writing anxiety (e.g., Ariyanti, 2017; Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2015; Qadir et al., 2021), there is still a lack of research specifically examining its symptoms, causes, and coping strategies among Thai postgraduate students. Research on academic writing anxiety is particularly important because it provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by EFL learners and offers practical solutions for addressing these challenges. Studies have shown that understanding the symptoms and causes of writing anxiety can help educators develop targeted interventions to support students. For instance, Wahyuni et al. (2019) found that providing students with constructive feedback and creating a supportive learning environment can significantly reduce writing anxiety. Similarly, Zhang (2011) emphasizes the importance of teaching students effective writing strategies, such as brainstorming, outlining, and revising, to build their confidence and competence.

In addition to addressing the symptoms of anxiety, research on academic writing anxiety can contribute to the development of educational policies and practices that promote student success (e.g., Cheng, 2004b; Horwitz, 2001). By identifying the factors that contribute to anxiety, educators and administrators can design curricula that are more inclusive and supportive of diverse learners. This is particularly relevant in Thailand, where English is a foreign language, and students face unique challenges in acquiring advanced writing skills (Rungruangthum, 2011). Moreover, researchers and educators in EFL contexts struggling with academic writing anxiety may adapt these findings as guidelines for designing curricula or supporting students in reducing writing

anxiety. However, investigation of the specific symptoms, causes, and coping strategies among Thai postgraduate students remains essential for bridging a critical gap. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the following research questions:

1. What are the symptoms and causes of academic writing anxiety among Thai postgraduate students studying English as a foreign language?

2. How do Thai postgraduate students studying English as a foreign language deal with academic writing anxiety?

Literature Review

This section explores the key concepts and research that form the foundation of this study. It begins by discussing academic writing, focusing on its importance and the challenges it presents in the EFL context. The review then explores writing anxiety, examining its symptoms and causes and exploring practical strategies that students use to cope with it. Finally, the review highlights related studies, linking them to the current research to provide context and a clearer understanding of the topic.

Academic Writing

Academic writing is a formal style of writing used in scholarly and academic contexts to present ideas, research findings, and arguments. It is characterized by clarity, precision, objectivity, and evidence-based reasoning, aimed at contributing to the academic community (Swales & Feak, 2004). Academic writing typically adheres to specific structures and conventions, such as the use of formal tone, citation practices, and logical argumentation. In postgraduate settings, academic writing serves as a primary tool for expressing critical ideas and engaging in scholarly discourse, including the writing of research papers, theses, and journal articles (Hyland, 2009).

As Matsuda (2015) highlights, academic writing is not merely a linguistic activity but also a social and rhetorical process. It involves understanding the conventions of specific academic disciplines and engaging with the broader academic community. For postgraduate students, mastering academic writing requires both linguistic proficiency and rhetorical awareness, which are essential for producing high-quality work that meets disciplinary standards.

Academic writing is crucial in postgraduate education, as it is the primary mode of communication in academic environments. It allows students to present research, support claims with evidence, and contribute to knowledge in their field (Hyland, 2009). For postgraduate students, effective academic writing is vital for success in their studies and future careers, as it is required for producing dissertations, publishing research, and engaging with other scholars (Swales & Feak, 2004). Mastery of academic writing also enhances students' ability to think critically, analyze literature, and engage in intellectual debates (Tahira & Haider, 2019).

As Weigle (2002) emphasized, writing proficiency encompasses more than the ability to produce grammatically accurate sentences. It includes the ability to structure ideas coherently, use appropriate vocabulary, and tailor writing to meet academic and cultural expectations. This is particularly challenging for EFL students, who must balance language acquisition with mastering the rhetorical conventions of academic writing.

For EFL postgraduate students, academic writing presents specific challenges due to the demands of writing in a second language. Second-language learners are expected to produce written texts that demonstrate complexity, accuracy, and fluency (Zabihi et al., 2020). These measures assess students' ability to construct grammatically correct sentences (accuracy), present ideas with sophistication (complexity), and write seamlessly without hesitation (fluency) (Barrot & Agdeppa, 2021). However, EFL students often struggle with linguistic and cultural differences in writing conventions, which can hinder their ability to express complex ideas clearly and coherently (Leki, 2001). Additionally, the pressure to produce high-quality academic texts in a foreign language can lead to increased anxiety and feelings of self-doubt among EFL students, particularly when faced with the high expectations of academic institutions (Chatdecha & Liangpanit, 2023).

Writing Anxiety

Daly and Miller (1975) introduced the concept of writing anxiety, or writing apprehension, which describes the worry that students experience when completing written tasks. This anxiety often leads to a tendency to avoid the writing process or even academic examinations. Writing anxiety is considered a significant linguistic obstacle that prevents students from functioning effectively during writing activities (Aripin & Rahmat, 2021). Writing anxiety arises from concerns about how their writing will be perceived by others who read it (Rasuan & Wati, 2021). A number of research papers found that in the context of academic writing, students must produce clear, well-structured, and evidence-based arguments within strict academic conventions, which often trigger feelings of anxiety (Sa'adah & Ali, 2022). For example, Ariyati (2017) discovered that EFL students had the highest levels of writing anxiety when completing academic writing assignments. Moreover, Rohmah and Muslim (2021) investigated the perspectives of five EFL undergraduate students regarding their academic writing practices and the challenges related to writing anxiety. One of the students shared her anxiety-provoking experience when encountering her first academic writing task. She felt anxious due to the high level of difficulty it required, such as expressing her ideas in a series of sentences and organizing them into cohesive and coherent paragraphs.

Writing anxiety can hinder a learner's ability to write. Kurniawati and Atmojo (2022) identified three effects of writing anxiety on the thesis writing process, which is a form of academic writing. These effects include writing procrastination, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes. These consequences may increase students' anxiety and, as a result, lead them to avoid participating in writing activities altogether.

1. Symptoms and Causes of Writing Anxiety

Cheng (2004a) proposed a three-dimensional conceptualization of writing anxiety: Somatic Anxiety, Cognitive Anxiety, and Avoidance Behavior. Somatic Anxiety refers to physical symptoms such as increased heart rate, sweating, and muscle tension, particularly during high-stakes writing tasks. Cognitive Anxiety involves intrusive thoughts, mental blocks, and excessive self-doubt, which hinder the clarity and organization of ideas. Avoidance Behavior is demonstrated by a tendency to avoid writing tasks (Cheng, 2004a; Rasuan & Wati, 2021; Rudiyanto, 2017).

Moreover, Cheng (2004a) created the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), which consists of three subscales: Somatic Anxiety, Cognitive Anxiety, and Avoidance Behavior. They developed SLWAI from 10 reliable and valid instruments, using the quality of a timed essay as a measure of the participants' English writing performance (English Use Anxiety Scale, English Classroom Anxiety Scale, English Writing Apprehension/Attitude Test, English Writing Block Questionnaire, English Writing Self-Efficacy Scale, Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-College, Test Anxiety Scale, Math Anxiety Scale, English Writing Motivation Scale, State Anxiety Scale, Index of English Writing Performance). Numerous academics have investigated the links between various components of writing anxiety in second language and aspects of writing performance and practices using the SLWAI's three subscales (e.g., Rezaei & Jafari, 2014; Zhang, 2011). This SLWAI categorization is used in the current study to describe the symptoms of writing anxiety that EFL students encounter.

Zhang (2011) identified eight potential causes of ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors: a lack of topical knowledge, linguistic difficulties, fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, insufficient writing practice, insufficient writing technique, a lack of effective feedback, and a fear of tests. The researcher emphasized eight situation-specific remarks in the questionnaire. These are often encountered in circumstances involving second-language writing (Cheng, 2002; Hassan, 2001; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Similarly, Prasetyaningrum et al. (2021) identified four primary triggers of writing anxiety: a high frequency of writing assignments, low self-confidence, time pressure, and difficulties in topic selection. Wahyuni et al. (2019) also found issues with topic choice, linguistic difficulties, and lack of writing practice. Similarly, Rezaei and Jafari (2014) found that linguistic challenges and fear of assessments are key triggers for writing apprehension. Interpersonal concerns also play a significant role. Cheng (2004b) highlighted that fear of criticism or rejection from instructors or peers often amplifies writing anxiety.

Writing anxiety presents as a combination of physical, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms, influenced by a range of internal and external factors. These challenges can significantly impede students' academic performance, particularly in settings with high expectations and demanding standards. Addressing the underlying symptoms and causes is essential for reducing writing anxiety and fostering a supportive academic environment.

2. Strategies to Cope with Writing Anxiety

Examining practical strategies to manage writing anxiety during the academic writing process is essential, as writers in the field of language learning frequently encounter this challenge. Understanding effective coping strategies can benefit not only writers but also writing instructors and educators by providing targeted interventions to address anxiety (Talasee & Poopatwiboon, 2024). Wahyuni et al. (2019) suggested five key coping strategies employed by Indonesian EFL learners: preparation, positive thinking, relaxation, peer-seeking, and resignation. These findings align with the framework proposed by Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004), who categorized strategies for managing writing anxiety into three broad types: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Cognitive strategies involve techniques such as positive thinking and seeking peer support. Affective strategies, such as relaxation, aim to reduce stress and physical tension, while behavioral strategies emphasize preparation to enhance performance. Further supporting this framework, recent research has echoed the findings of Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004). For instance, Cahyono et al. (2023) and Chatdecha and Liangpanit (2023) found that EFL learners commonly adopt strategies aligned with cognitive, affective, and behavioral approaches. Additionally, specific techniques have been highlighted for their effectiveness. Talasee and Poopatwiboon (2024) emphasized the role of self-talk in managing writing anxiety, while Jawas (2019) underscored the importance of staying focused and calm during the writing process. Therefore, this research underscores the significance of understanding how EFL students cope with writing anxiety to design effective support systems. By combining insights from these studies, educators and instructors can implement targeted strategies that not only alleviate anxiety but also improve students' writing performance and overall confidence in academic tasks.

Related Studies

This section reviews previous research on language writing anxiety, particularly in relation to EFL learners. Several studies have explored writing anxiety during the writing process among EFL learners (e.g., Huwari & Al-Shboul, 2015; Rezaei & Jafari, 2014). Sun et al. (2024) examined Chinese EFL learners' perceptions toward and sources of their writing anxiety during the writing process, highlighting the implications for the teaching and learning of EFL writing courses. Similarly, Wahyuni et al. (2019) investigated the levels, causes, and coping strategies of writing anxiety among Indonesian EFL college students. These studies suggested that EFL learners often experience anxiety during the writing process, primarily due to a lack of prior knowledge. Students reported feeling anxious when uncertain about how to organize their ideas or structure their writing. Furthermore, these learners expressed the need for strategies to reduce writing anxiety, including clear instructions on how to approach writing tasks, provision of appropriate resources, individualized feedback, and a supportive learning environment.

Additional research has investigated other components of second language writing anxiety. For instance, Shang (2013) explored potential associations between

foreign language writing anxiety, gender, year of writing experience, writing self-efficacy, and actual writing skills among 146 juniors majoring in English at a private university in Taiwan. The study found that writing anxiety is particularly prevalent in EFL writing courses, regardless of how long students had studied English writing. Male students, who tended to be more concerned about their writing, performed better than female students. Moreover, students with lower levels of anxiety felt more confident in their writing abilities, exhibiting greater self-efficacy and perceived writing skills.

Kirmizi and Kirmizi (2015) investigated writing self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and the cause of fear among 172 English Language and Literature students enrolled in a Turkish public institution. The data reveal that participants exhibit poor self-efficacy for content, correctness, design, and unity but a high level of efficacy for punctuation. The participants expressed a moderate amount of nervousness about writing. Male students, the study discovered, have better self-efficacy for writing and less writing anxiety. Furthermore, the study revealed that time restrictions and negative teacher evaluations were the two most often stated causes of writing anxiety in Turkish L2 students. Finally, correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant negative relationship between writing self-efficacy and writing anxiety.

On the other hand, Qadir et al. (2021) aimed to assess the amount of writing anxiety experienced by postgraduate students studying EFL in this context when writing in English. Additionally, the study evaluated the relationship between writing apprehension and age, gender, academic level, and socioeconomic status. Although nearly half of the students reported feeling extremely nervous when writing in English, the majority reported feeling moderately nervous, and the relationship between writing apprehension levels and variables was not statistically significant; that is, age, gender, academic level, and socioeconomic status did not affect writing apprehension. Nonetheless, instructors should be aware of the signs of writing anxiety in the classroom and take steps to reduce it. Aripin and Rahmat (2021) also discovered evidence of writing anxiety displayed by a female ESL writer during the writing process.

When considering the context of writing, several studies have supported exploring writing anxiety in the aspect of academic writing. Oi (2023) highlighted the academic writing demands at universities, noting that students are required to express logical thinking and high-level reasoning. This academic environment can influence students' writing anxiety, particularly in English academic writing. Similarly, Ariyati (2017) examined writing anxiety among EFL students at the university level, finding that students experienced high levels of anxiety due to time constraints and a lack of self-confidence, often stemming from insufficient English proficiency.

As highlighted in previous research, much of the existing literature on writing anxiety in a second language primarily focuses on undergraduate students, with limited attention given to postgraduate students across various academic years. While many studies have explored ESL writing anxiety, there is a noticeable gap in research specifically examining how EFL postgraduate students experience and manage writing anxiety within the context of academic writing. This gap is particularly critical, as

postgraduate students often face distinct challenges in academic writing that are not adequately addressed in the existing literature. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing language writing anxiety among Thai EFL postgraduate students. Using a mixed-methods research design that includes a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, the study investigated the symptoms and causes of writing anxiety among these students and the strategies they use to cope with it. By focusing specifically on Thai EFL postgraduate students, this research seeks to offer valuable insights into how they manage the unique pressures of academic writing anxiety and contribute to the development of more targeted, effective instructional strategies in this area.

Methodology

Participants

The participants of this study were 30 postgraduate students enrolled in the Master of Arts in English program at Khon Kaen University. These students were selected with quota sampling to ensure an equal representation of first-year, second-year, and third-year students, with an equal distribution of 10 participants from each year group. Quota sampling was selected to capture diverse perspectives and experiences across different academic stages, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. They all agreed to complete the online survey and participate in the semi-structured interviews voluntarily. The selection criteria were as follows:

- First-year students: Participants had completed at least three credits in a course focusing on Academic Reading and Writing in English. They had experience in academic English writing tasks such as report writing and mini-research projects.
- Second-year students: Participants had completed at least three credits in a thesis-related course and gained experience drafting thesis proposals in English.
- Third-year students: Participants had completed at least five credits in thesis-related courses and had successfully defended their thesis proposals. They also had extensive experience in writing theses and research papers in English.

All participants were enrolled in the first semester of the academic year 2022 and had experienced at least one semester of academic English writing instruction. This ensured that they could provide valuable insights into their experiences as EFL learners in academic writing contexts.

The university review board granted an ethics approval of the study (HE663102) before participant recruitment and data collection.

Research Instruments

The present study employed two instruments. First, the Academic Writing Anxiety Inventory (AWAI) questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data. This five-Likert scale questionnaire was adapted from Cheng (2004a), which demonstrated

strong internal reliability, with a reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.91., and Zhang (2011), which addresses specific writing experiences encountered by EFL students and had been adopted in many studies related to second language writing anxiety in the EFL context (e.g., Syarifudin, 2020). Referring to these justifications, the measures were renamed the Academic Writing Anxiety Inventory (AWAI) and employed to assess participants' anxiety symptoms and causes during the academic writing process.

The questionnaire includes three sections: (1) Personal Data, (2) Anxiety Symptoms, and (3) Anxiety in Writing Situations. To ensure its validity, two specialists in applied linguistics and English language education reviewed the questionnaire for content validity. All items received an IOC score of 1.0, indicating a high level of congruence with the research objectives. Once finalized, the questionnaire was created using Google Forms for distribution and data collection.

A semi-structured interview was also employed to collect qualitative data to investigate strategies the students used to cope with their difficulties and anxiety. The interview questions were adapted from Aripin and Rahmat (2021), which cover key aspects relevant to this study. Specifically, the questions explored the strategies employed by participants with high levels of writing anxiety to manage their challenges effectively. The interview focused on two main themes: (1) participants' general perceptions of English writing and the difficulties they face, and (2) the strategies they use to address their difficulties and anxiety. The validity of the interview questions was reviewed by the same two specialists who validated the questionnaire, with all items receiving an IOC score of 1.0. The interviews were conducted via Zoom, facilitating in-depth discussions while maintaining flexibility in the interview process.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study were collected between July and September 2023, during a period when remote learning was still in effect due to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire link was distributed through both formal and informal channels, including Facebook chat and Line groups, to ensure a broad reach among the participants. The collected data were then analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics, specifically mean and standard deviation (SD). Additionally, five negatively worded items (1, 4, 17, 18, and 22) from the Anxiety Symptoms section were reverse-scored before being included in the quantitative analysis. The interpretation of the mean scores for each item in Anxiety Symptoms section is as follows: 1.00–1.49 means *No Anxiety or Very Low Anxiety,* 1.50–2.49 means *Low Anxiety,* 2.50–3.49 means *Moderate Anxiety,* 3.50–4.49 means *High Anxiety,* 4.50–5.00 means *Very High Anxiety.* The interpretation of the mean scores for each item in the Writing Situations section is as follows: 1.00–1.49 means *Strongly disagree*, 1.50–2.49 means *Disagree*, 2.50–3.49 means *Moderate*, 3.50–4.49 means *Agree*, 4.50–5.00 means *Strongly agree.*

After the questionnaire results were gathered, students with high levels of anxiety were selected for individual interviews to examine the strategies they use to

manage it. Prior to the interviews, participants provided informed consent, and permission was obtained to record both video and audio for transcription and analysis. During the semi-structured interviews, students were asked to recall the contexts and situations in which they felt anxious while writing academic tasks and the difficulties they encountered when writing in academic English. The participants were encouraged to share the strategies they used to cope with it.

The interview data was transcribed, and after which the researcher carefully reviewed and coded significant features throughout the data. These codes were subsequently categorized into themes. The themes were then detailed and summarized to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the findings.

Results

The results are reported and discussed to address the two research questions in this study. Quantitative data were analyzed to answer Research Question 1: *What are the anxiety symptoms and causes of academic writing anxiety among Thai postgraduate students studying English as a foreign language?* Meanwhile, qualitative data obtained from in-depth interviews were used to explore Research Question 2: *How do Thai postgraduate students of English deal with academic writing anxiety?*

1. Anxiety symptoms of academic writing

This section reports academic writing anxiety symptoms based on a three-dimensional conceptualization of academic writing anxiety, which includes Somatic Anxiety, Cognitive Anxiety, and Avoidance Behavior (Cheng, 2004a). The data is presented in an overall summary and analyzed according to the students' academic year.

The overall academic writing anxiety among Thai postgraduate students is categorized into somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, and avoidance behavior. According to Table 1, cognitive anxiety emerged as the highest category ($\bar{x}$=2.79, SD=1.20), indicating a moderate level of anxiety. The data suggest that students experience significant concern and nervousness when their academic writing tasks are evaluated. This is evidenced by the highest score ($\bar{x}$=3.31, SD=1.25), followed by somatic anxiety ($\bar{x}$=2.65, SD=1.13), indicating that the students experience physical symptoms of anxiety during academic writing tasks. Particularly, item 2 ($\bar{x}$=3.00, SD=0.82) and item 6 ($\bar{x}$=3.00, SD=1.22) reflect moderate anxiety levels. Avoidance behavior had the lowest score ($\bar{x}$=2.29, SD=1.18), indicating a lower level of engagement in avoidance-related behaviors. Specifically, item 4 ($\bar{x}$=2.00, SD=0.91) and item 18 showed low engagement in English writing practice outside the classroom ($\bar{x}$=2.08, SD=0.95).

Table 1

Overall Anxiety Symptoms of Academic Writing Anxiety

Items	x̄	SD	Meaning
Somatic Anxiety			
Item 2. When I'm pressed for time and have to do English writing tasks, research proposals, or thesis proposals, my heart starts to race a little faster.	3.00	0.82	Moderate Anxiety
Item 6. When I begin working on English writing assignments, research proposals, or thesis, my mind frequently goes blank.	3.00	1.22	Moderate Anxiety
Item 8. I tremble or perspire when I am pressed for time when composing English writing assignments, research proposals, and thesis.	2.54	0.88	Moderate Anxiety
Item 11. My ideas become confused when I am pressed for time when completing English writing assignments, research proposals, and thesis.	2.92	1.38	Moderate Anxiety
Item 13. I frequently experience fear when I am pressed for time when completing English writing assignments, research proposals, and thesis.	2.46	1.13	Low Anxiety
Item 15. When I am abruptly assigned English writing assignments, research proposals, or a thesis, I freeze.	2.31	1.11	Low Anxiety
Item 19. When I compose English writing assignments, research proposals, and thesis, I frequently feel my entire body hard and strained.	2.31	1.25	Low Anxiety
Total	**2.65**	**1.13**	**Moderate Anxiety**
Cognitive Anxiety			
Item 1. I'm not nervous at all while writing in English.	2.69	1.11	Moderate Anxiety
Item 3. When I'm creating English writing assignments, research proposals, or thesis, I'm concerned and nervous if I'm aware they'll be reviewed.	3.31	1.25	Moderate Anxiety
Item 7. I'm not concerned that my English writing assignments, research proposal, and thesis are far worse than those of my classmates.	2.85	1.21	Moderate Anxiety
Item 9. If my English writing assignments, research proposal, and thesis are reviewed, I'm afraid I'll receive a failing mark.	2.54	1.27	Moderate Anxiety
Item 14. I'm afraid that other students would deride my English writing assignments, research proposal, and thesis if they read it.	2.62	1.12	Moderate Anxiety
Item 17. I am completely unconcerned with what others think of my English writing assignments, research proposal, and thesis.	3.08	1.26	Moderate Anxiety
Item 20. I'm scared that my English writing assignments, research proposal, and thesis will be selected for discussion in class as an example.	2.46	1.33	Low Anxiety
Item 21. I have no fear that my English writing assignments, research proposal, or thesis will receive a very low grade.	2.77	1.17	Moderate Anxiety
Total	**2.79**	**1.20**	**Moderate Anxiety**

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Avoidance Behavior			
Item 4. I frequently choose to write my thoughts down in English.	2.00	0.91	Low Anxiety
Item 5. Generally, I make an effort to avoid English writing assignments, research proposals, and thesis writing.	2.31	1.25	Low Anxiety
Item 10. I make every effort to avoid circumstances that need me to write in English.	2.15	1.28	Low Anxiety
Item 12. Unless I were forced to, I would avoid writing assignments, research proposals, and thesis in English.	2.15	0.99	Low Anxiety
Item 16. If required to compose English writing assignments, research proposals, or a thesis, I would make every effort to excuse myself.	2.92	1.44	Moderate Anxiety
Item 18. I normally take advantage of any opportunity outside of class to complete English writing assignments, research proposals, and thesis	2.08	0.95	Low Anxiety
Item 22. Whenever feasible, I would write my assignments, research proposals, and thesis in English.	2.38	1.33	Low Anxiety
Total	**2.29**	**1.18**	**Low Anxiety**

2. Causes of academic writing anxiety

The questionnaire investigated the causes of academic writing anxiety in eight areas: lack of topical knowledge, linguistic difficulties, fear of negative evaluation, low confidence, insufficient writing practice, insufficient writing technique, lack of effective feedback, and fear of tests. The participants were asked to identify the causes or factors that contribute to their academic writing anxiety.

Table 2
Causes of Academic Writing Anxiety

Causes	$\bar{x}$	SD	Meaning
1. Lack of topical knowledge	3.00	1.08	Moderate
2. Linguistic difficulties	2.69	0.95	Moderate
3. Fear of negative evaluation	2.54	1.27	Moderate
4. Low confidence	2.85	1.46	Moderate
5. Insufficient writing practice	2.62	1.19	Moderate
6. Insufficient writing technique	2.77	1.09	Moderate
7. Lack of effective feedback	2.15	0.99	Disagree
8. Fear of test	2.77	1.42	Moderate
Total	**2.67**	**1.18**	**Moderate**

Table 2 indicates that the most significant source of academic writing anxiety is the lack of topical knowledge. Students frequently report that they do not know what to write, particularly under time constraints ($\bar{x}$=3.00, SD=1.08), followed by low confidence ($\bar{x}$=2.85, SD=1.46), and insufficient writing technique ($\bar{x}$=2.77, SD=1.09). A lack of effective feedback was the least significant cause of academic writing anxiety ($\bar{x}$=2.15, SD=0.99).

3. Postgraduate students' coping strategies for academic writing anxiety

To answer Research Question 2, "*How do Thai postgraduate students studying English as a foreign language deal with academic writing anxiety?*", five participants who experienced high levels of academic writing anxiety were interviewed regarding the strategies they use to cope with the difficulties and anxiety when writing academic papers. The findings revealed that all five participants with high levels of academic writing anxiety were third-year students. Their responses were recorded and analyzed. The data provided insights into their perceptions of English academic writing, emphasizing the strategies they employed to overcome their academic writing anxiety. The participants utilized various ways to deal with their anxiety such as seeking support from others, using cognitive strategies, and time management.

The first strategy highlighted by almost all respondents was the importance of seeking support from others to cope with writing anxiety. Students 2 and 5 mentioned that they often talked to their MA classmates or peers with similar experiences to share the difficulties they were facing. They believed this not only helped relieve some of the pressure but also provided practical solutions, as their peers occasionally suggested strategies they had successfully used in the past. Similarly, Student 4 sought support from someone they trusted and who could serve as a good listener after an unsuccessful attempt to consult with their supervisor, much like Student 1, who chose to talk with their mother. The excerpt below reflects their perspectives: "*...I talked to my mother. She is my good listener, but she cannot help me...*" (Student 1)

> "*I talked to my MA classmate who can be my assistance and also consult with my advisor and other professor to help me in my works*" (Student 2)

> "*I try to talk to my advisor and consult about my work but sometimes it doesn't help me a lot.*" (Student 4)

> "*I talked to my boyfriend and find someone who can be my listener. Sometimes I just want to express my tension out. I did not want anyone to give me the advice or answer*" (Student 4)

> "*...I talk to my peers*" (Student 5)

The second strategy for reducing writing anxiety involved taking a pause or break from the writing process. Three participants mentioned using this approach. Students 2 and 4 believed that when they were under pressure and experiencing anxiety, they were unable to produce quality work. Taking a short break allowed them to return to the process with a clearer mindset. Similarly, Student 5 emphasized the importance of relaxation and mentioned finding comfort in food that improved their mood and helped them feel more positive. The excerpts below reflect their perspectives:

> "*... Sometimes I don't even have in progress of my work because I cannot write. I'm paused and when I feel better. I will write again...*" (Student 2)

"...Actually, when I have anxiety, I stop writing my thesis. I know that if I force myself to do my work would come out not good...." (Student 4)

"...I go outside and take a break from my work and eat..." (Student 5)

The third strategy was developing a positive mindset. Two participants emphasized the importance of this approach. Student 2 explained that adopting the mindset of taking small steps and accepting this small progress helped reduce self-imposed pressure. Similarly, Student 3 shared that managing expectations, including concentrating on others and not focusing only on submission deadlines and supervisor feedback, helped them feel less anxious. Both participants highlighted that adjusting their mindset played a significant role in coping with writing anxiety. The excerpts below reflect their perspectives:

"... I try to do a bit by a bit and tell myself that it's okay I try my best. Don't put pressure on myself you can do as you okay..." (Student 2)

"…I thought that I write this for my friend not for my teacher. I think about others. If I think I have to submit to teacher in time, I will think a lot and cannot write..." (Student 3)

The last strategy for managing writing anxiety was effective time management. Student 1 emphasized the importance of planning and allocating sufficient time for writing tasks. They believed that having more time to work on their writing allowed them to produce better-quality work and reduced the stress associated with tight deadlines. This approach highlights the role of time management in alleviating pressure and enabling a more focused and less anxious writing process. The excerpt below reflects their perspectives:

"If I have more time, I would write better." (Student 1)

Discussion

The results are discussed in two main aspects. First, the analysis focuses on the anxiety symptoms and causes of academic writing anxiety among Thai postgraduate students studying English as a foreign language. Second, the discussion highlights the strategies employed by Thai postgraduate students to manage and cope with academic writing anxiety.

As for the symptoms of academic writing anxiety, the results from the AWAI questionnaire revealed that cognitive anxiety is the most dominant symptom of academic writing anxiety experienced by Thai postgraduate students. This finding aligns with Cheng's (2004a) three-dimensional model of writing anxiety, which identifies cognitive anxiety as a key component characterized by excessive worry, fear of negative evaluation, and self-doubt. The prominence of cognitive anxiety in this study confirms its central role in EFL learners' writing experiences. Specifically,

students expressed significant concern and nervousness when their academic writing tasks were evaluated. This finding aligns with prior research. For instance, Zhang (2011) identified cognitive anxiety as the most common form of ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors, attributed mainly to high-pressure tests and evaluations. Similarly, Wern and Rahmat (2021) observed a high prevalence of cognitive anxiety among Chinese students. These parallels suggest that cognitive anxiety may be a widespread issue in EFL contexts, particularly in Asian cultures where academic success is often closely tied to personal and social expectations.

The findings further support those of Rezaei and Jafari (2014), who identified cognitive anxiety as the primary cause of high levels of writing anxiety among Iranian students. Their research indicated that an intense focus on performance, combined with overly high expectations of both themselves and their instructors, heightened anxiety levels. A critical examination of these patterns suggests a possible cultural influence on cognitive anxiety, where collectivist values and a strong focus on academic success may intensify students' fear of failure or criticism. It is important to recognize that while cognitive anxiety is a significant factor, other factors also contribute to the challenges faced by EFL students. For instance, the fear of making grammatical mistakes, using incorrect vocabulary, or not following the rules of academic writing in English can increase cognitive anxiety (Rasuan & Wati, 2021). This highlights the dual challenge EFL learners face in mastering both language proficiency and academic writing standards, which can feel particularly overwhelming. It is also similar to the findings of Ariyati (2017), who reported that the fear of receiving negative feedback or failing to meet professors' expectations can considerably increase anxiety levels. This suggests that cognitive anxiety is not entirely self-imposed but is also influenced by external factors such as instructor attitudes and institutional assessment methods.

The results related to the causes of academic writing anxiety revealed that a lack of topical knowledge was the largest challenge experienced by Thai postgraduate students. Also, the students reported struggling with the issue of topical knowledge, particularly under time pressure. Aripin and Rahmat (2021) found similar results, indicating that time pressure results in it being even more difficult for students to generate ideas and organize their thoughts. When students are asked to write about unfamiliar topics with tight deadlines, they may experience higher cognitive anxiety and feel unprepared and stressed (Cheng, 2004b; Prasetyaningrum et al., 2021). This stress is exacerbated by the need to write clearly in English, which requires both language skills and a good understanding of the topic. When students lack knowledge about the topic, it increases the difficulty for them to generate ideas, lowers their confidence, and affects their overall writing (Ariyati, 2017). The interaction between limited content knowledge and linguistic challenges suggests a need for integrated approaches that address both knowledge-building and language proficiency simultaneously.

The results of the present study also show that low confidence is a significant factor contributing to academic writing anxiety. This finding is similar to those reported by Prasetyaningrum et al. (2021). This issue is particularly challenging for students

learning EFL, as they already face difficulties writing in a language that is not their own (Rezaei & Jafari, 2014). To address this, Wahyuni et al. (2019) suggested incorporating reading and writing in class, which can help students build sufficient knowledge on the topic. In addition, classroom management should be carefully designed to support students in improving their writing skills (Pimsarn, 2013). Providing a specific program to encourage additional writing practice beyond standard curriculum topics can also boost students' confidence and reduce their sense of being overwhelmed (Wahyuni et al., 2019).

In addition, the results from the AWAI questionnaire accord with those of the semi-structured interviews in that the postgraduate participants were particularly concerned about linguistic issues such as writing fluency and grammatical accuracy. Some reported that receiving low writing scores in childhood led to a lack of confidence in their writing abilities. This finding suggests that the issue of confidence is not isolated. It is deeply connected to students' previous experiences, particularly those involving negative feedback. These results are consistent with many previous studies (e.g., Cheng, 2004b; Rezaei & Jafari, 2014; Wahyuni et al., 2019; Zhang, 2011), which confirm that students in an EFL context face significant challenges in academic English writing, particularly in the aspects of linguistic difficulties and low confidence. Linguistic difficulties, including problems with grammar, vocabulary, and syntax, appear to be a crucial factor for EFL students, unlike native students, because the EFL context often emphasizes grading and evaluation procedures (Zhang, 2011). This suggests that evaluation can lead to increased pressure on students, making them more vulnerable to anxiety, especially when they receive negative feedback. The impact of the pressure is evident in the current study, in which one participant mentioned that negative evaluations caused them to suffer and doubt their writing abilities (Kurniawati & Atmojo, 2022). This underscores the long-term impact of assessment practices on students' self-perception and writing abilities. This finding is also consistent with the study of Shang (2013), which noted that EFL students often struggle with confidence in their writing due to the high stakes associated with grading and assessment. The fear of making mistakes and receiving low scores can create a cycle of anxiety that reduces students' ability to express themselves effectively in writing.

To ameliorate this issue, feedback and evaluation should not focus primarily on grammar or textual organization; students' ideas should also be valued. As suggested by Kara (2013), instructors should approach error correction as an opportunity to encourage growth and learning rather than as a form of punishment. To help students alleviate academic writing anxiety stemming from low confidence in their writing ability, it may be helpful to encourage them to recognize that they are not alone in their anxiety. Group discussions in small groups or with the whole class can allow students to express their concerns regarding academic writing (Cheng, 2004b).

The findings of this study indicate that most participants adopted various strategies to cope with academic writing anxiety. A common approach was seeking support from individuals they trust, such as teachers, peers, or significant others. This aligns with findings from previous studies (e.g., Cahyono et al., 2023; Jawas, 2019;

Kurniawati & Atmojo, 2022; Wahyuni et al., 2019), which emphasize the importance of social support in alleviating anxiety and building confidence. However, while effective, this strategy highlights systemic issues. Reliance on peer or teacher support raises concerns about the availability and accessibility of these resources. Additionally, the effectiveness of creating a collaborative environment, where students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and receiving feedback, is also worth exploring critically. Another key strategy reported by participants was taking pauses or short breaks during the writing process. Participants noted that stepping away from their work temporarily helped them manage their anxiety and approach writing with greater clarity. This finding aligns with Jawas's (2019) study, which highlights the benefits of such breaks in reframing thoughts, reducing stress, and enabling students to approach academic writing with greater ease and focus. By incorporating these practices, students can work more comfortably and maintain a healthier mindset while navigating the demands of academic writing. However, while this strategy appears individually effective, it may lead to concern about how students manage their overall time and workload. Without proper time management skills, this strategy could delay progress and contribute to a cycle of procrastination.

The findings highlight that while students employ various strategies to manage academic writing anxiety, these methods have their limitations. To provide more effective support, academic institutions need to address the structural and pedagogical factors contributing to this anxiety. Integrating individual approaches, such as seeking support and taking breaks with initiatives, guided peer feedback, and time management training, can help students navigate the challenges of academic writing with greater confidence and less stress.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the symptoms and causes of academic writing anxiety among Thai postgraduate EFL students and how they manage this anxiety. The findings revealed that cognitive anxiety was the most prominent type of academic writing anxiety. Major causes included a lack of topical knowledge, low confidence, and linguistic difficulties. The study also highlighted that high levels of anxiety were closely linked to linguistic challenges and low confidence in academic English writing. Participants identified four key strategies for managing academic writing anxiety: seeking support from others, taking breaks or pausing during the writing process, adopting a positive mindset, and employing cognitive strategies such as effective time management.

Based on these findings, it is evident that academic writing anxiety significantly impacts EFL students, especially given the high standards required for graduation. These findings may guide instructors and universities in curriculum design and classroom management. First, to reduce the fear of negative evaluation, instructors should focus on the clarity of students' ideas as much as grammar accuracy. Second, creating opportunities for students to share and address their concerns during the writing

process can help build confidence. Finally, to address a lack of topical knowledge, instructors should incorporate reading activities that expose students to diverse topics.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study can be further enhanced by increasing the number of participants and including students from all academic years. The small sample size and limited representation across academic levels may not fully capture the broader population. Future research should include more participants from each year level to provide more comprehensive insights. Furthermore, the data were collected during a period of remote online learning, which may have influenced participants' responses and the data collection process. The online format might have restricted the depth of interaction and the immediacy of participants' reactions. Future studies should consider in-person data collection methods, such as face-to-face interviews or focus groups, to gather more detailed information about students' experiences.

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