

The Impact of Gender and Proficiency on L2 Writing Anxiety among Algerian EFL Students: Levels, Categories, Causes, and Coping Mechanisms

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Abstract:

Introduction: This study investigates L2 writing anxiety among Algerian EFL Master's students, focusing on anxiety levels, types, causes, coping strategies, and the effects of gender and proficiency.

Methods: A mixed-methods approach was used, incorporating a semi-structured interview alongside two instruments: the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory and the Second Language Writing Anxiety Reasons Inventory. Participants included 220 Master's students selected through stratified random sampling.

Results: Most students exhibited moderate to high writing anxiety, primarily cognitive and somatic. Gender differences were minimal, but lower-proficiency students reported significantly higher anxiety. Avoidance behaviours were the least reported.

Discussion: Linguistic concerns, fear of evaluation, and time constraints were major anxiety triggers. Unlike prior studies, teacher influence was not a primary factor, though students desired clearer feedback. Coping strategies included self-regulation, brainstorming, and seeking peer and teacher support.

Limitations: The study focused on Master's students, limiting generalizability to other proficiency levels. Self-reported data may also introduce bias.

Conclusions: Providing structured feedback, supportive teaching strategies, and targeted language development can reduce anxiety and enhance students' writing confidence.

Key words: L2 writing anxiety, gender, proficiency, coping strategies.

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Introduction

Writing is a challenging skill that requires cognitive effort, linguistic knowledge, and effective language use (Myles, 2002; Hyland, 2016). For many L2 learners, writing anxiety causes negative thoughts, task avoidance, and physical symptoms like nervousness and stress (Han & Hiver, 2018; Cheng et al., 1999), which can impact academic performance (Daly & Miller, 1975; Pajares & Johnson, 1995). This form of anxiety, distinct from general L2 anxiety, is categorized into cognitive, somatic, and avoidance behaviours (Cheng, 2004b). Although factors like gender and proficiency may influence this anxiety (İlhan & Tutkun, 2020; MacIntyre, 1999), limited research has explored their specific effects.

This study aims to investigate anxiety among Algerian EFL Master's students, focusing on its prevalence, causes, and coping strategies, while examining the impact of gender and proficiency. It seeks to fill the gap in literature regarding these factors.

1 Literature review

1.1 L2 writing anxiety

L2 writing anxiety is a common challenge that hinders students' ability to write effectively in a foreign language, often due to language proficiency issues, fear of negative feedback, and lack of confidence (Tayşi & Taşkin, 2018; Guy & Gardner, 1985). This anxiety induces nervousness and stress, disrupting the writing process and reducing text coherence (Horwitz et al., 1986). It may also lead to excessive focus on grammar and vocabulary at the expense of overall message clarity, limiting fluency and expressiveness.

Instruments like the Foreign Language Writing Anxiety Scale (FLWAS) and the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) have identified key components of writing anxiety - cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behaviour (Cheng, 2004b; Daly & Miller, 1975). These tools distinguish writing anxiety as a unique form of language anxiety, offering deeper insight into the challenges L2 writers face (Cheng, 2004a).

1.2 L2 writing anxiety and different constructs

L2 writing anxiety is closely linked to factors like self-efficacy. Research shows that low writing self-efficacy, or a lack of confidence in writing ability, often leads to higher anxiety, which negatively affects writing performance (Woodrow, 2011; Li, 2022). Anxiety also impacts task-specific outcomes, such as accuracy and fluency in narrative and argumentative tasks (Zabihi et al., 2018). Additionally, goal orientation plays a role: mastery and performance-approach goals can reduce anxiety and motivate improvement, while performance-avoidance goals increase anxiety and hinder performance (Sabti et

al., 2019). Motivational factors, like the 'ought-to L2 writing self', and academic procrastination also contribute to anxiety (Tahmoureshi & Papi, 2021; Zhang & Zhang, 2022). Understanding these factors is important for creating interventions to reduce L2 writing anxiety, especially for Algerian EFL Master's students, whose language proficiency and gender may influence anxiety levels.

1.3 Factors contributing to L2 writing anxiety in students

L2 writing anxiety stems from intrinsic (e.g., gender, proficiency) and extrinsic factors (e.g., time pressure, peer/teacher expectations). While some studies suggest males experience higher anxiety (Jebreil et al., 2015), gender findings remain inconsistent. Proficiency significantly impacts anxiety, with lower-skilled students - especially those struggling in their L1 - facing greater challenges in structured or critical tasks (Guo, 2018). External pressures like timed exams, peer competition, and strict grading criteria further exacerbate anxiety (Elif & Yayli, 2019; Palmquist & Young, 1992; Cheng, 2004a).

1.4 Previous studies on L2 writing anxiety

Research on L2 writing anxiety across diverse contexts reveals consistent patterns. Turkish EFL students experience moderate-high anxiety due to language difficulties and evaluation fears (Zerey, 2013), while Indonesian learners show moderate anxiety unrelated to gender or education level (Mulyono et al., 2020). Jordanian students exhibit high cognitive anxiety linked to language barriers and low confidence (Rabadi & Rabadi, 2020), and Afghan learners report moderate anxiety driven by linguistic challenges, time pressure, and evaluation concerns (Quvanch & Na, 2022). Despite these insights, Algerian EFL students remain understudied. This study addresses this gap by investigating how gender and proficiency influence writing anxiety in Algeria's unique sociocultural and educational context. Specifically, it aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are different levels and categories of L2 writing anxiety experienced by Algerian EFL students?
2. How do gender and L2 proficiency affect students' L2 writing anxiety?
3. Is there a significant difference in perceptions of writing course quality, teacher support, and writing ability across different levels of writing anxiety among Algerian EFL Master's students?
4. How do students perceive the causes and effects of their L2 writing anxiety?
5. What coping mechanisms do students employ to manage L2 writing anxiety?

2 Research methodology

2.1 Research design

This study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive view of the research topic.

2.2 Participants

The study population comprised Master 1 and Master 2 Algerian students majoring in English at Batna 2 University during the 2023–2024 academic year. Students were distributed across three academic options: Language and Applied Linguistics (LLA), Language and Culture (LC), and Didactics (DID). Across these options, the Master 1 group included 78 students in LLA, 85 in LC, and 88 in DID, while the Master 2 group comprised 75 students in LLA, 84 in LC, and 85 in DID. This study explored the impact of two independent variables - gender and L2 proficiency, measured by students' most recent semester general average - on their responses to a survey evaluating levels of L2 writing anxiety.

The study used a stratified random sampling technique to ensure comprehensive representation across subgroups, aiming for a sample size of 90% from each subgroup. This approach improved the validity of comparisons across key variables like level (Master 1 and Master 2), gender, and proficiency. The final sample included 220 students, representing about 90% of the total population.

Table 1

The survey participants

<u>Academic Option</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Proficiency Level</u>	<u>Number of Students</u>
		Male	High	5
		Male	Moderate	7
		Male	Low	5
		Female	High	9
		Female	Moderate	10
		Female	Low	7
		Male	High	5
		Male	Moderate	7
		Male	Low	3
		Female	High	6
		Female	Moderate	7
		Female	Low	4
		Male	High	5
		Male	Moderate	7
		Male	Low	4
		Female	High	9

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Language and Culture	Master 2	Female	Moderate	10
		Female	Low	7
		Male	High	4
		Male	Moderate	7
		Male	Low	3
		Female	High	7
		Female	Moderate	9
Didactics	Master 1	Female	Low	7
		Male	High	5
		Male	Moderate	7
		Male	Low	5
		Female	High	10
		Female	Moderate	11
	Master 2	Female	Low	7
		Male	High	4
		Male	Moderate	7
		Male	Low	3
		Female	High	7
		Female	Moderate	9
		Female	Low	7

The sample included 99 male students (45%) and 121 female students (55%), ensuring proportional gender representation. Proficiency levels were categorized based on semester averages: 109 students (49.5%) were in the high proficiency group (above 80%), 125 students (56.8%) were in the moderate range (60-79%), and 89 students (40.5%) were in the low proficiency group (below 60%). This stratification ensured adequate representation of each subgroup, strengthening the findings across gender and proficiency levels.

2.3 Data collection: Tools and procedures

The study used two validated instruments to collect quantitative data. The first was Cheng's (2004b) Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), a 22-item Likert-scale tool with three subscales: cognitive anxiety (8 items), somatic anxiety (7 items), and avoidance behaviour (7 items), with seven items requiring reverse scoring. The SLWAI showed strong reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.82$).

The second instrument was Kara's (2013) Second Language Writing Anxiety Reasons Inventory (SLWARI), which had a Cronbach's α of 0.91 and construct validity of 0.66. This inventory assesses factors contributing to writing anxiety.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of 25 participants, representing both genders and varying proficiency levels. Participants answered an open-ended questionnaire with eight questions, developed from the literature, to explore the causes and effects of L2

writing anxiety. The interviews, conducted face-to-face in December 2023, lasted 15 minutes and were audio-recorded with participants' consent.

2.4 Validity and reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collection tools, both quantitative and qualitative instruments were carefully selected and tested. The SLWAI showed strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82, reinforcing its reliability and construct validity in measuring anxiety-related factors in L2 writing. The survey was administered with attention to neutrality and consistency to avoid biased responses.

The interview questions were developed based on a thorough literature review to ensure content validity, focusing on key anxiety factors. The interviews, conducted in English, followed a standardized format, were face-to-face, and audio-recorded for accuracy. For reliability, the interview data underwent a rigorous process of transcription, coding, and theme development, which was repeated twice. A deductive approach was used to align the themes with the study's objectives, supporting the credibility of the qualitative data.

2.5 Data analysis

Student responses were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27). Descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, and range, were calculated. Differences in student responses were explored using the Independent Samples t-test and One-way ANOVA.

For qualitative data, interview recordings were transcribed and analyzed thematically. The researcher read the transcripts multiple times to identify patterns and developed codes, categories, and themes. The data were manually coded twice for consistency, using a deductive approach to align themes with the study's focus areas (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3 Findings

3.1 Quantitative findings

3.1.1 Anxiety levels

To address the research question on L2 writing anxiety levels among Algerian EFL Master's students, participants were categorized based on their total SLWAI scores. Anxiety levels were classified as high (scores above 75), average (scores between 55 and 75), and low (scores below 55), following Zerey (2013).

Table 2

Distribution of anxiety levels among participants

<i>Categories of anxiety</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
High-level anxiety	126	57.3
Average-level anxiety	70	31.8
Low-level anxiety	24	10.9
Sum	220	100.0

Table 2 presents the distribution of participants across anxiety levels. Among the 220 participants, the majority (126 students, 57.3%) reported high anxiety in L2 writing, indicating significant discomfort and stress. In comparison, 70 students (31.8%) exhibited average anxiety, while only 24 students (10.9%) had low anxiety, suggesting that low writing anxiety is uncommon. These findings highlight a notable prevalence of high writing anxiety and the need for strategies to address it among Algerian EFL students. Additionally, the scores for the cognitive anxiety items in the SLWAI were calculated, with results shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics of items related to cognitive anxiety

<i>Item</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
1. I do not feel nervous when writing in English.	220	3.15	1.26		
3. I feel uneasy and anxious about English writing assignments when I know they will be graded.	220	3.56	1.36		
7. I am not concerned that my English writing is significantly worse than my peers'.	220	3.15	1.53	1	5
9. I worry about receiving a low grade when my English writing is evaluated.	220	3.90	1.34		
14. I feel anxious that other students might mock my English writing if they read it.	220	2.79	1.48		
17. I have no concerns about peers' opinions on my English writing.	220	3.05	1.41		
20. I am fearful of my English writing being selected as a discussion example in class.	220	3.12	1.40		
21. I am not at all afraid that my English writing would be rated as very poor.	220	3.12	1.37		

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for cognitive anxiety in L2 writing. The highest anxiety levels were associated with performance assessment, particularly Item 9, which addresses the fear of receiving a low grade, showing the highest mean score ($M=3.90$). Item 3, related to anxiety about graded writing compositions, also had a high mean ($M=3.56$), indicating significant concern about formal assessments.

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On the other hand, Item 14, which reflects students' anxiety about peer reactions ($M=2.79$), had the lowest mean score, suggesting that students are less worried about being ridiculed by classmates. This suggests that formal grading has a stronger impact on cognitive anxiety than peer feedback in L2 writing.

Table 4 presents the values for items associated with somatic anxiety, another distinct type of anxiety identified by the SLWAI.

Table 4

Descriptive statistics of items related to somatic anxiety

<i>Item</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
2. I feel my heartbeat racing when I write English compositions within a limited time.	220	3.44	1.47		
6. My mind often goes blank when I begin working on an English composition.	220	3.36	1.47		
8. I start to shake or sweat when writing English compositions under time pressure.	220	3.15	1.45		
11. My thoughts get confused when writing English compositions within a time limit.	220	3.64	1.35	1	5
13. I frequently feel panic when writing English compositions under time pressure.	220	3.47	1.38		
15. I freeze when I'm suddenly asked to write English compositions.	220	3.31	1.30		
19. I often feel tense and stiff throughout my body while writing English compositions.	220	2.88	1.42		

Table 4 shows students experienced significant somatic anxiety during English writing, particularly under time pressure (Items 11 & 13 with means of 3.64 and 3.47), manifesting as mental confusion rather than severe physical symptoms (Item 19 mean=2.88). These results indicate time constraints were the primary trigger for cognitive-focused somatic anxiety. The findings on avoidance behavior are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Descriptive statistics of items related to avoidance behaviour

<i>Item</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
4. I often choose to write down my thoughts in English.	220	2.83	1.10		
5. I usually do my best to avoid writing English compositions.	220	3.12	1.29		
10. I do my best to avoid situations in which I have to write in English.	220	3.08	1.33		
12. Unless I have no choice, I would not use English to write compositions.	220	3.22	1.27		

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16. I would do my best to excuse myself if asked to write English compositions.	220	3.05	1.17	1	5
18. I usually seek every possible chance to write English compositions outside of class.	220	2.91	1.35		
22. Whenever possible, I would use English to write compositions.	220	2.77	1.21		

Table 5 shows that items related to avoidance behaviours in English writing have moderately high values. The highest mean score ($M=3.22$) is linked to the statement, "Unless I have no choice, I would not use English to write compositions," indicating that students generally prefer to avoid writing in English. In contrast, the lowest mean score ($M=2.77$) corresponds to the item, "Whenever possible, I would use English to write compositions," suggesting that while some students avoid writing in English, others are willing to do so when necessary.

Table 6 presents the results of the independent samples t-test analysis for gender, exploring its relationship with L2 writing anxiety and its sub-constructs.

Table 6

Independent samples T-Test results for gender differences in SLWAI constructs

<u>SLWAI Constructs</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>p</u>
Overall L2 Writing Anxiety	Male	106	2.98	0.66	1.153	0.252
	Female	114	3.12	0.63		
Cognitive Anxiety	Male	106	3.19	0.75	0.621	0.532
	Female	114	3.27	0.69		
Somatic Anxiety	Male	106	3.20	1.13	0.857	0.393
	Female	114	3.38	0.96		
Avoidance Behaviour	Male	106	2.68	0.72	-0.239	0.810
	Female	114	2.64	0.73		

The study found no significant gender differences in L2 writing anxiety levels or its components (cognitive, somatic, avoidance behaviors). Statistical analysis showed comparable anxiety levels between female ($M=3.10$) and male ($M=2.96$) students across all measures ($p>0.05$ for all comparisons), despite slightly higher reported means among females. Levene's test ($F=0.042$, $p>0.05$) confirmed equal variances between groups. These results indicate gender doesn't substantially influence writing anxiety in this sample. The study also examined L2 proficiency effects through ANOVA analysis (results in Table 7).

Table 7

One-way ANOVA results for the relationship between SLWAI scores and L2 proficiency

<i>Level</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>SLWAI Perceptions</i>					
Low Proficiency	62	3.41	0.58	5.276	0.006**
Moderate Proficiency	87	3.05	0.60		
High Proficiency	71	2.75	0.64		
<i>Cognitive Anxiety</i>					
Low Proficiency	62	3.57	0.56	4.279	0.016*
Moderate Proficiency	87	3.22	0.69		
High Proficiency	71	2.90	0.75		
<i>Somatic Anxiety</i>					
Low Proficiency	62	3.77	0.92	3.808	0.025*
Moderate Proficiency	87	3.31	1.01		
High Proficiency	71	3.84	0.97		
<i>Avoidance Behaviour</i>					
Low Proficiency	62	2.87	0.69	1.260	0.287
Moderate Proficiency	87	2.60	0.76		
High Proficiency	71	2.51	0.73		

The results in Table 7 show significant differences in L2 writing anxiety across proficiency levels. Students with lower proficiency experienced higher overall writing anxiety (SLWAI perceptions) compared to their more proficient peers, with a statistically significant difference ($p=0.006$). Cognitive anxiety and somatic anxiety were also higher among low-proficiency students ($p=0.016$ and $p=0.025$, respectively), while high-proficiency students reported lower anxiety levels. However, avoidance behaviour did not vary significantly across proficiency levels ($p=0.287$). These findings suggest that higher L2 proficiency is linked to lower cognitive and somatic anxiety, but has minimal impact on avoidance behaviours.

Table 8

Descriptive analysis of SLWAI items

<i>Item No.</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Male (N=106)</i>	<i>Female (N=114)</i>	<i>Total (N=220)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Teacher Role in Writing Class (Items 2, 5, 7, 9, 17, 18)</i>						
2	Teachers demonstrate a good understanding of the subject matter.	2.53	2.60	2.57	1.38	1.46
5	Teachers answer questions about difficulties in writing class.	2.45	2.49	2.47	1.36	1.34
7	Teachers provide critical feedback on writing.	2.85	2.91	2.88	1.37	1.43
9	Teachers speed up the lessons and it	2.75	2.83	2.79	1.33	1.37

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	is difficult to grasp topics.					
17	Teachers are interactive and exciting in teaching.	2.88	2.91	2.90	1.32	1.32
18	Teachers give good examples to help students write better.	2.67	2.72	2.70	1.34	1.42
Writing Classes and Course Materials (Items 1, 6, 8, 13, 19)						
1	Writing difficulties are due to lack of writing course background.	2.22	2.36	2.29	1.36	1.46
6	The course handout has helpful examples.	2.63	2.72	2.65	1.43	1.34
8	The course exercises are less than required.	2.64	2.70	2.67	1.46	1.37
13	Irregularity in class attendance is not a reason for failure.	2.52	2.61	2.57	1.43	1.33
19	The content of the course book is satisfactory.	2.65	2.71	2.68	1.45	1.45
Writing Ability and Skills (Items 3, 4, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16)						
3	Students cannot write about any topic due to limited grammatical knowledge.	2.72	2.83	2.78	1.44	1.34
4	Students find it easy to find a topic to write about.	2.32	2.41	2.37	1.42	1.42
10	Struggle with writing tasks due to lack of practice.	2.35	2.45	2.40	1.33	1.38
11	Students face difficulties in coming up with initial ideas for writing tasks.	2.46	2.56	2.51	1.34	1.44
12	Writing is a delicate skill and requires practical tasks.	3.06	3.09	3.08	1.39	1.38
14	Students find troubles with organizing ideas correctly.	2.48	2.61	2.54	1.36	1.39
15	Students face difficulties in putting ideas into words.	2.58	2.76	2.67	1.36	1.46
16	Students doubt their creativity when writing.	2.62	2.71	2.67	1.35	1.38

Table 8 reveals mixed perceptions of writing instruction. Students positively rated teachers' subject knowledge (M=2.57) and classroom interaction (M=2.90), but found lesson pacing challenging (M=2.79). While course materials were generally satisfactory (M=2.65-2.68), students desired more exercises. Writing difficulties stemmed from grammatical gaps (M=2.78), insufficient practice (M=2.40), and struggles with idea organization (M=2.54) and expression (M=2.67). Creative writing confidence was particularly low (M=2.67). The results highlight a disconnect between supportive instruction and students'

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foundational writing challenges, suggesting needs for adjusted pacing, enhanced practice opportunities, and stronger focus on basic skills development.

Table 9

One-way ANOVA results based on three anxiety categories for SLWAI items

<i>Category</i>	<i>Sum of Squares (SS)</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square (MS)</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig. (p-value)</i>
Writing Course					
Between Groups	1.126	2	0.563	0.032	0.864
Within Groups	432.892	197	2.197		
Total	434.018	199			
Teachers					
Between Groups	18.520	2	9.260	1.013	0.318
Within Groups	1799.394	197	9.135		
Total	1817.914	199			
Writing Ability					
Between Groups	3.240	2	1.620	0.221	0.644
Within Groups	1443.562	197	7.327		
Total	1446.802	199			

The ANOVA analysis revealed no statistically significant relationships between students' anxiety levels and their perceptions of writing instruction. For writing courses ($F=0.029$, $p=0.864$), teacher roles ($F=0.996$, $p=0.322$), and writing abilities ($F=0.209$, $p=0.649$), all p-values exceeded the significance threshold, indicating anxiety levels did not meaningfully affect these dimensions. These findings suggest students' evaluations of course quality, teacher effectiveness, and self-assessed writing skills remain consistent regardless of their anxiety category, implying other unidentified factors likely play a more substantial role in shaping their writing experiences.

3.2 Qualitative analysis

3.2.1 Factors contributing to L2 writing anxiety

Table 10

Codes and categories related to the theme “Contributing factors to L2 writing anxiety”

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Categories</u>	<u>Codes</u>
Factors Contributing to L2 Writing Anxiety	Language and Subject-Matter Challenges	- Insufficient vocabulary and grammar - Insufficient content knowledge - Organization difficulties - Lack of prior experience - Anxiety over cohesion - Writing style and unfamiliar genres - Fear of writing - Unfamiliar/disliked topics
	Personal Factors	- Feelings of inadequacy - Overthinking - Perfectionism - Grade-focused mindset - Balancing responsibilities
	Interpersonal Factors	- Peer comparison - Lack of peer collaboration - Peer pressure - Discouraging teacher feedback
	External Factors	- Noisy classrooms - Time constraints - In-class writing sessions - In-class feedback timing

Table 10 highlights various sources of L2 and domain-related anxiety, primarily linked to language struggles and content knowledge. Many students reported feeling anxious when lacking vocabulary, grammar, or knowledge, with S1 stating, *“When I don’t know enough about a topic, I can only write a few sentences and feel anxious about what I don’t understand.”* In addition to language issues, poor essay organization and unfamiliar genres were concerns, as S2 explained, *“I get worried about structuring my essay correctly; it makes me ask myself, ‘Is this what my teacher expects?’* Personal factors, such as feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, further contributed to anxiety, with S4 admitting, *“Even when I study a lot, I still feel like I’ll fail to do well in writing.”* Additionally, stresses like perfectionism, an overemphasis on grades, and balancing academic and personal responsibilities, as noted by S3, *“Having so much on my plate makes it hard to focus,”* added to the pressure. Interpersonal factors, such as peer competition and discomfort with teacher feedback, also

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played a role; for example, S5 shared, “When I see others writing easily, I question if I’m just not good enough,” while S2 mentioned, “Harsh comments make me feel I can’t meet expectations.” Finally, external factors like noisy classrooms, time constraints, and in-class writing tasks commonly triggered anxiety. As S3 reflected, “I prefer writing at home where I can take my time, but in class, the pressure and time limit stress me out.” While some students felt timed tasks helped them improve, these external factors generally increased their anxiety.

3.2.2 Effects of L2 writing anxiety

Table 11

<i>Codes and categories related to the theme “Impact of L2 writing anxiety”</i>		
<i>Effect Type</i>	<i>Emerging Categories</i>	<i>Codes</i>
Negative	Memory Disruptions	- Forgetting known information - Blanking vocabulary - Loss of grammar rules
	Emotional Distress	- Feeling upset - Frustration - Disappointment - Irritability
	Physical Reactions	- Nervous breakdown - Sweating - Heart racing
	Writing Hurdles	- Unable to continue writing - Stopping frequently - Loss of ideas
	Decreased Speed	- Slowed down writing - Overthinking sentences Hesitation
	Reduced Creativity	- Low confidence - Second-guessing - Fear of judgment
	Increased Focus	- Motivates to avoid procrastination - Brings urgency
Positive	Heightened Alertness	- Attention to detail - Careful wording - Re-checking work
	Enhanced Motivation	- Sense of responsibility - Pushing oneself to perform
	Improved Organization	- Structured writing process - Planned approach
	No Significant Change	- Same performance with or without anxiety - Unaffected thinking
Neutral	Consistent Workflow	- Regular pace - Unaffected speed - Steady mindset

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Detached Perspective	- Minimal emotional impact - Logical approach to tasks
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Many students reported that anxiety caused loss of focus, difficulty recalling material, emotional distress, slower writing speed, and even complete cessation of writing. For instance, S5 explained, “*Once anxiety creeps in, I lose even basic vocabulary.*” Similarly, S7 described how anxiety led to frustration, making it harder to continue. For those experiencing severe anxiety, S3 shared, “*It slows down my writing - I keep thinking, ‘Will this sound right?’*” However, some students viewed anxiety as a motivator, helping them stay focused. S2 said, “*Nervous energy makes me write faster and more focused.*” On the other hand, a few students, like S6, reported no noticeable impact, stating, “*I write the same whether I’m anxious or not.*”

3.2.3 Mechanisms to cope with L2 writing anxiety

Table 12 outlines the strategies students use to cope with L2 writing anxiety, categorized into four main groups: stress-relieving factors, personal regulation methods, skill-enhancement techniques, and recommendations for support from teachers and peers.

Table 12

Codes and categories related to the theme “Mechanisms to cope with L2 writing anxiety”

<u>Emerging Theme</u>	<u>Emerging Categories</u>	<u>Codes</u>
Mechanisms to cope with L2 writing anxiety	Anxiety-Reducing Factors and Circumstances	- Writing about favorite topics - Positive feedback from peers and teachers - Teacher approval and support - Ungraded writing tasks - No strict time constraints - Take-home assignments - Working alone to focus
	Self-Management Practices	- Positive self-talk and motivational phrases - Taking breaks during writing - Practicing stress-relief techniques (e.g., deep breathing) - Organizing and planning ideas in advance
	Skill-Building Techniques	- Expanding vocabulary knowledge - Following structured writing steps (e.g., brainstorming, outlining) - Reviewing and revising for cohesion - Improving general language proficiency through extra practice
	Suggestions for	- Clear and detailed example essays - Encouraging teacher feedback

Teacher and Peer Support	- Peer feedback sessions - Class-wide discussions to reduce pressure - Minimizing competitive grading - More engaging and varied course materials
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Students reported various strategies to cope with L2 writing anxiety. Many found writing about engaging topics reduced their anxiety. S1 said, *“When I write about topics I enjoy, I’m less nervous and more motivated.”* Positive feedback from peers and instructors also boosted confidence, as S2 noted, *“Even small positive feedback makes me feel more confident.”* A supportive, non-judgmental environment alleviated anxiety.

Time flexibility helped reduce stress, with S13 explaining, *“Writing take-home assignments helps me think without rushing.”* Personal practices like listening to calming music (S4), positive self-talk (S5), and taking breaks (S6) also helped manage anxiety.

Students also focused on improving specific language skills, like expanding vocabulary (S7) and using structured writing steps (S8). To reduce anxiety, they suggested that teachers provide clear guidance and focus more on learning than grading (S9, S10). Peer support and less classroom competition were also important, as S11 shared: *“When we work together, I feel like we’re helping each other.”*

4 Discussion

4.1 Findings on L2 writing anxiety levels and types

This study examined L2 writing anxiety among Algerian EFL Master’s students, focusing on anxiety levels, types, causes, and the impact of gender and proficiency. Most students experienced high or average anxiety, aligning with previous research (Horwitz et al., 1986; Cheng, 2004a). Cognitive and somatic anxiety were most common, reflecting concerns about language proficiency and fear of evaluation.

There were no significant gender differences in anxiety, suggesting that graduate-level academic demands may outweigh gender factors. Although male students reported slightly higher anxiety, the difference was not statistically significant, supporting the inconclusive role of gender.

Proficiency influenced anxiety levels. Lower proficiency students had higher cognitive and somatic anxiety, consistent with studies linking low proficiency to increased anxiety (Cheng, 2004a; Atay & Kurt, 2006). However, no significant differences in avoidance behaviours were found, which contrasts with studies linking low proficiency to higher avoidance (Cheng, 2004a), suggesting avoidance may stem from subtle disengagement rather than overt coping.

Cognitive anxiety was the most common, followed by somatic anxiety, with avoidance behaviour the least reported. Despite anxiety, students were motivated to complete tasks, which aligns with findings by Gkonou (2011) and Cheng (2004a). The motivation expected of Master's students may explain their persistence.

4.2 Findings on causes of writing anxiety

The factors identified in this study, such as limited vocabulary, grammar concerns, and difficulties in generating and organizing ideas, align with previous research (Gkonou, 2011; Alnufaie & Grenfell, 2013). Many students also cited exam pressure and time constraints as significant anxiety sources, similar to findings by Cheng (2004a) and Maria (2006).

However, the role of teachers and course materials in exacerbating anxiety was less significant than expected. Unlike previous studies (e.g., Cheng, 2004; Atay & Kurt, 2006), students did not report strong negative impacts from teachers, though they expressed a desire for clearer examples and feedback. Regarding course materials, anxiety was only linked to unclear or insufficiently detailed content, which contrasts with studies emphasizing the negative influence of course materials (e.g., Cheng, 2004a).

4.3 Findings on coping strategies

The study found that students used various coping strategies to manage L2 writing anxiety, including self-affirmations, breaks, brainstorming, outlining, and seeking feedback. These strategies highlight the multi-dimensional nature of writing anxiety and students' adaptability. Many students felt less anxious when writing about topics they were passionate about, supporting Shang's (2013) finding that personally meaningful topics reduce anxiety by shifting focus away from language accuracy.

Suggestions for reducing anxiety included clearer instructions, more formative feedback, and a supportive classroom atmosphere. These align with Cheng's (2004a) research, which emphasizes the importance of teacher support in alleviating anxiety. The need for clearer feedback and more support suggests that instructors play a key role in helping students manage anxiety, though this role may be more complex than previously thought.

Conclusion

This study explores L2 writing anxiety among Algerian EFL Master's students, examining its prevalence, types (cognitive, somatic, avoidance), causes, and coping strategies. Findings indicate that most students experience moderate to high anxiety, primarily due to linguistic proficiency gaps, while gender differences were insignificant. Students manage anxiety through self-regulation, peer support, and process-oriented feedback.

The study suggests that EFL teachers should adopt supportive strategies, such as focusing on the writing process, providing encouraging (rather than accuracy-focused) feedback, and using collaborative group work. Additional recommendations include allowing more topic choice, reducing time pressure, and incorporating reflective writing to boost confidence.

Limitations include a single-institution sample, cross-sectional design, self-report bias, and the exclusion of factors like personality traits and prior writing experience.

Future research should evaluate the effectiveness of proposed interventions, conduct longitudinal studies on anxiety development, and incorporate broader factors like personality and prior experience for a more comprehensive understanding of L2 writing anxiety.

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