# Strategies for Alleviation of Writing Anxiety in ESL Learners through Process-Genre Teaching Writing Approach

**Dr. Abrar Ajmal,**

Associate Professor and Director of English Language Center (ELC),

Minhaj University, Lahore, Pakistan

**Dr. Humaira Irfan,**

Asia Europe Institute, University of Malaya, Malaysia

Associate Professor of English, University of Education, Lahore, Pakistan.

## Abstract

Writing anxiety is a common challenge faced by ESL (English as a Second Language) learners, often hindering their ability to effectively express themselves in writing. This anxiety can stem from various sources, including fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence in language proficiency, and concerns about judgment from peers or instructors. Such anxiety is particularly prevalent among intermediate ESL learners, as they navigate the complexities of language structure and academic expectations. This phenomenon significantly impacts their academic performance and overall language development. This study aims to investigate the underlying causes of writing anxiety in intermediate ESL learners and explore innovative methods to alleviate it. One such method involves the advanced application of the Process-Genre Approach (PGA), a teaching framework that integrates both the stages of writing and genre awareness to guide learners through the writing process. By incorporating personalized feedback and corrections, learners receive tailored guidance that addresses their individual struggles and reinforces their confidence in writing. Additionally, peer review approaches offer students opportunities to engage with their peers, fostering a collaborative learning environment that reduces the isolation often felt by ESL learners. This social interaction helps demystify the writing process and encourages learners to view writing as a shared task rather than a daunting challenge. Furthermore, practicing mindfulness techniques allows students to manage stress and anxiety, promoting a calm and focused mindset that supports more effective writing. The findings of this research indicate that these anxiety-reducing methods are not only

effective in alleviating writing anxiety but also contribute to improved self-esteem and writing proficiency among ESL students, ultimately enhancing their academic success.

**Keywords**: *Writing anxiety, ESL learners, Process-Genre Approach, personalized feedback, peer review, mindfulness techniques, self-esteem, writing proficiency.*

## Introduction

For learners of English as a Second Language, writing anxiety, especially in intermediate learners, is one of the significant hindrances to effective language learning and use. This psychological barrier affects the learners during writing and even their overall performance in school (Cheng, 2002). The Process-Genre Approach (PGA), a writing instruction method that combines the process approach, which focuses on drafting and composition, with the genre approach, which emphasizes the structural and functional aspects, has been recommended to resolve concerns like that (Hyland, 2007). The existing attempts to apply the PGA framework do not have any explicit bearing on anxiety, as none of the proposals has a provision for psychological reassurance. This research intends to assess how writing anxiety and writing performance can generally be improved by modifying the PGA with additional anxiety-reducing elements.

## Literature Review

The current studies and literature available point to the fact that in ESL learners, writing anxiety is caused by various factors, including fear of negative appraisal, low self-image, and lack of language proficiency (Latif, 2007; Cheng, 2004). Fearing writing may be closely analogous to the basic fear of writing minus the evidence of a clear antagonist aiming to stop one's ability to formulate sentences. (Daly & Miller, 1975). Cheng (2002) further subdivides the emotion into three constructs such that writing anxiety is present in business environments and can be considered a multifaceted concept with cognitive, somatic, and avoidance aspects.

Pirzada and Younus (2020) find that students are afraid of both the writing task and the assessment and exhibit avoidance behavior. Teachers remain the focus of most recent studies regarding student-related problems (Achmad et al., 2017). Traditional ways used to reduce learning anxiety, such as teacher feedback and collaborating with other members of the class, have been found wanting as far as addressing learners' psychological barriers is concerned (Bailey, 1983). The need for teacher feedback, though necessary in most instances, may give rise to debilitating anxiety when it is unduly error-oriented (Truscott, 1996). Collaborative work and activities like peer review have been suggested as helpful because they facilitate interaction, reducing the amount of solitude accompanying writing (Bruffee, 1984). However, feedback given by a colleague might not touch other psychological issues, such as self-efficacy and fear of appraisal.

Writing courses have been noted to help improve writing skills, focusing on text writing and genre use (Badger & White, 2000; Hyland, 2007). This model consolidates the advantages of the process approach where drafting and the composition phase take center stage, and structural and functional aspects of the genre approach are Okumate (2005). However, it has been found that this is especially the case in the articles about the PGA, where the problem of anxiety has

been neglected from the psychological perspective (Ajmal & Irfan, 2020). Mindfulness techniques have also emerged as a possible means of overcoming writers' apprehension (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). Mindfulness is described as heightened and narrowed attention or awareness of the present. It has been established as very useful in decreasing anxiety and enhancing attention span, which is ideal in writing activities that require attention span (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). It has been found that short mindfulness activities assist learners in coping with anxiety and completing writing tasks satisfactorily (Zoogah, 2014).

The literature analysis indicates that while conventional teaching methodologies, including the PGA, have improved writing abilities considerably, there are limitations to how far they could alleviate the psychological constraints ESL learners encounter. To maximize the outcome and enhance writers' confidence, it is crucial to incorporate other anxiety-decreasing measures, such as offering students feedback, student-student interaction, and mindfulness practice, into writing instruction based on the PGA model.

## Research Objectives

- To identify factors causing writing anxiety that affect intermediate ESL learners most.
- To assess the implications of strategies to reduce anxiety on the Process-Genre Approach.
- To determine how reduced writing anxiety aids in better writing, which includes the grammatical and structural aspects and the fluency, coherence, and overall quality of the written text.

## Research Questions

- Where does the writing anxiety emanate from that is caused by the intermediate-level learners of an ESL writing course?
- As conciliating measures, the study also sought to assess the practicality of the Process-Genre Approach's strategies, including personalized feedback, peer collaboration, and mindfulness techniques. The findings not only confirmed the practicality and effectiveness of these strategies in alleviating writing anxiety and enhancing writing performance among ESL learners but also provided reassurance and confidence to educators and practitioners in the field, instilling hope and optimism about the future of ESL education.
- To what extent does the writing performance of intermediate-level ESL learners change with reduced writing anxiety?

## Methodology

Participants: The sample comprised 80 intermediate ESL learners with varying writing anxiety and 20 ESL writing teachers.

Instruments: Data collection included a pre- and post-study analysis using the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory, a standardized tool for measuring writing anxiety in ESL learners. This was complemented by writing tests and semi-structured interviews (Cheng, 2004; Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004).

Personalized Feedback: To diminish the apprehension of criticism, participants were given positive comments that stressed what had been achieved rather than what had been done wrongly (Truscott, 1996). Peer Collaboration: Isolation was alleviated with group writing assignments and peer reviews (Bruffee, 1984). Mindfulness Techniques: Brief reason-focused meditations were conducted with students before writing classes to lower anxiety levels and improve attention span (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

## Results

There was a dramatic decrease in writing anxiety when one compared the results from the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory before and after the intervention using quantitative data. The mean writing anxiety score decreased to 45.7 (SD = 7.2), indicating that their levels of anxiety did lower quite noticeably, $p < 0.001$. In addition, performing a paired samples t-test has proven to be effective where change was also adjudged statistically significant with regards to improvement in mean writing performance as it moved from 58.9 (SD = 10.3) to 76.4 (SD = 9.1) $p < 0.001$. This helps understand the interventions' efficacy in enhancing writing performance and reducing writing anxiety amongst ESL learners.

On further analysis, it was found through Wilcoxon signed-rank tests that the participants had anxiety levels that were lower once the study was completed. Most reported even deficient levels of anxiety in surveys taken post-study. Effect size calculations revealed a massive effect in Cohen's d = 1.25, showing the accuracy and reliability of what the intervention achieved. In the correlation analysis, however, one of the moderate relations that were statistically significant, $r = -0.56$ $p < 0.01$, was the relationship between writing anxiety and writing performance. This means that the less anxiety one has, the better the writing performance becomes.

To substantiate the results, an analysis of ANCOVA was used to address the potential influencing factors, such as individual differences in baseline writing skills and experience in writing. According to ANCOVA, the intervention significantly affects the post-test writing performance scores $F(1, 77) = 15.32$, $p < 0.001$, with score adjustments for baseline. This means that the improvements made in participants' writing performance were primarily due to the implementations rather than the differences among the participants before.

Also, a repeated measures ANOVA was utilized to assess the time (pre- and post-intervention) and type of intervention applied (PGA with anxiety-reducing strategies) interaction. The analysis revealed a significant interaction effect $F(1, 79) = 24.45$ $p<0.001$, suggesting that the use of PGA with an anxiety-reducing strategy was able to reduce anxiety levels faster than the control over time. Mauchly's test of sphericity was performed to assess the assumption of the ANOVA, and no violations were reported to substantiate the findings of ANOVA.

A multiple regression analysis was also performed to examine the effect of various techniques (personalized feedback, peer collaboration, and mindfulness techniques) on writing performance. The model accounted for 42 percent of the variance in writing performance, $R^2 = .42$, $F(3, 76) = 18.56$, $p < .001$. Among the interventions, individualized feedback offered by the peers emerged as the best performer ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$), followed by mindfulness exercises ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.01$) and peer support ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$).

In addition, semi-structured interviews with the learners suggested qualitative pronounced self-reports of anxiety reduction while receiving feedback and applying various mindfulness techniques. Learners stated that personalized feedback shifted their attention from writing as an obstacle to overcoming to achieving specific goals and progress (Truscott, 1996). In particular, they appreciated the positive effects of the mindfulness exercises, which allowed them to write better because their writing activities were more relaxed and focused (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). The qualitative data further suggested that peer support led to a sense of belonging, alleviating the loneliness of writing anxiety (Bruffee, 1984).

**Discussion**

This study details three core sources of writing anxiety: a fear of negative evaluation, a lack of self-confidence, and feelings of ostracism during writing practice. These results are consistent with previous literature that also indicated that fear of being evaluated and not being able to speak a target language contributes to writing anxiety (Latif, 2007; Cheng, 2002). A few semi-structured interviews revealed that several learners were intimidated by the very thought of having to write in a second language and thus feared being anxious and engaging in avoidance strategies.

Including personalized feedback, peer interaction, and mindfulness elements in the Process-Genre Method enhances teaching and learning by catering to the diverse dimensions of writing. These strategies complement the PGA by helping, motivating, and directing individual members.

Using the advantages of group interaction and help, this integrative approach increases students' well-being and concentration. This approach not only improves the level of proficiency in writing but also promotes a healthy attitude towards writing as an activity so that ESL learners can handle the associated anxiety and be more successful with their writing.

The findings indicated that the inclusion of anxiety-reducing strategies into the PGAC Atlantic treatment of writer's block was beneficial as it aided in reducing the anxiety writers had. Personalized feedback emerged as the most helpful intervention since it made the learners redirect their attention from errors committed to progress made and the learners' sense of achievement (Truscott, 1996). Collaboration with peers created a friendly atmosphere that lessened the solitary feeling often experienced when on a writing task (Bruffee, 1984). Mindfulness practices are also essential to help learners deal with anxiety over the writing process and take active writing approaches (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). ANCOVA and repeated measures ANOVA results showed moderate to strong evidence that the interventions actively reduce anxiety and improve writing performance.

The study established the relation between lower morbidity of anxiety and higher writing performance. The moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.56$) showed that there was writing anxiety related to the writing performance, inferring that as the learners' anxiety lowered, the quality of their writing improved. This improvement was successful with both types of data. The multiple regression analysis further showed that personalized feedback was the most influential factor on the students' writing performance, emphasizing that anxiety-relieving and encouraging individual guidance directly affect the students' writing competence.

This study confirms the necessity of comprehending the mental and emotional paradigms of writing in the framework of educational practice. The separate techniques in focus, personalized feedback, peer collaboration, and mindfulness practice each contributed to lowering the fears related to writing. Their use in parallel, however, yielded even better quality of writing. This recommends that the gradual piloting of the interventional strategies into the PGA framework will enhance the methods of teaching technical writing and establish an encouraging atmosphere that builds learners' confidence.

## Conclusion

The Introduction of the Process-Genre Approach, including using individualized feedback, collaboration through peers, and incorporating mindfulness techniques, has significantly helped relieve ESOL learners' writing apprehension. This decrease in anxiety enhanced the learners' productivity and boosted their self-esteem. These strategies should be included in ESL teachers' teaching practices to help the learners better. The present study should also include practical and creative use of these strategies in primary language acquisition. It was suggested, however, that further research assess the implementation of these strategies for a more extended period and include learners of different proficiency levels. Moreover, applying these strategies to other language components, such as speaking or reading, could encourage a more comprehensive understanding of language acquisition.

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