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**RESEARCH PAPER**

## Strategies to Reduce Writing Anxiety by Using the Process-Genre Teaching Writing Approach (PGA) among Intermediate Students in Pakistan

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**ABSTRACT**

Writing anxiety is an issue faced by numerous students due to the traditional composing teaching method overwhelmingly followed in Pakistan. The paper aimed to distinguish the techniques that pre-university understudies used to decrease writing anxiety during the process-genre teaching methodology (PGA). In this qualitative investigation, a convenient sampling practice was followed. Data collection was completed through interviews and non-participant observation. Four strategies were suggested by the students to reduce writing anxiety while taught through PGA; cooperative composition, planning, peers' and educators' positive input and valuable analysis and applying a recursive course of composing for various kinds of academic writing. The review presumed that writing anxiety is a broad prevailing concern among ESL students and the traditional teaching writing product approach should be supplanted with the process-genre approach to curb writing anxiety.

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**KEYWORDS** ESL Writing Anxiety, Process-Genre Approach, Teaching ESL Writing Approaches

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**Introduction**

Learners of 'English as a Foreign Language' (EFL) need to develop the ability to write to communicate their ideas both in academic and real-life situations. There are many challenges faced by foreign language learners, including foreign language anxiety. It is vital to find out the factors caused by foreign language anxiety because it has negative effects on language learning and using the target language. Writing among all four skills has its importance, especially in academic settings, because writing discourse is the dominant medium of academia. Davidson (2018) says, "Writing is important because it is used widely in education and on the job. If students do not know how to express themselves, they will not be able to communicate well with peers, employers, professors, or just about anyone" (Davidson, 2018, p.15). Many studies pointed out the undesirable effects of writing anxiety on writing performance among ESL/ESL students (Aloairdhi, 2019).

ESL writing anxiety is a term mainly associated with negative feelings and obstruction in the flow of the writing process. Writing Anxiety has attracted the attention of many scholars to figure out the causes and to suggest strategies to cope with it (Jawas, 2019). Hasan (2001), cited in Zhang (2011), numbered many causes of writing anxiety in an ESL setting, including an "authoritative, teacher-centred product-based model of teaching". Genc &Yayli (2019) also pointed out the basis of ESL writing anxiety and emphasized the teachers' role in terms of applying an effective teaching method to help stressed ESL student writers. Writing in English is one of the important ESL skills required by ESL learners in Pakistan for communication, emails, notices, information,

and so on, or academic activities such as schoolwork, research papers, and assessments. Instructional research in the field of writing has experienced many major shifts over the last four decades e.g. Product, Process, Genre, and the combined Process-Genre Approach (Ajmal & Humaira, 2020; Abate, 2019).

In Pakistan, the education system has traditionally relied on conventional language teaching techniques, similar to many other ESL contexts. These methods primarily involve memorizing grammar rules and isolated phrases to learn a second language. However, introducing academic writing to intermediate ESL learners poses challenges due to limited adoption and understanding of newer approaches such as Process and Genre. These conditions are not unique to the ESL/EFL contexts, as the English Language holds a significant role and position, particularly in academic settings (Ajmal, 2022; Getnet, 2019).

The majority of ESL writing students at the intermediate/pre-university level are primarily taught using a teacher-centred and conservative approach known as the Product Approach, which emphasizes memorizing predefined answers. As a result, beginner students encounter significant difficulties, including writing anxiety. A study by Siddique and Singh (2016) reveals that teaching practices related to writing skills, such as providing model texts and relevant vocabulary, have been identified as problematic at the pre-university level (Ajmal, 2022; Fareed, Jawed, & Awan, 2018). To address this issue and alleviate writing anxiety among ESL students, it is suggested that the product approach be gradually replaced by a more contemporary methodology called the combined process-genre approach (PGA), which is believed to be more beneficial and supportive. The research's objective was to investigate how the process-genre approach to teaching writing affects the development of strategies for managing writing anxiety among intermediate-level learners in Pakistan. The study examined the impact of this approach on cognitive, somatic, and avoidance behaviors associated with writing anxiety (Ajmal & Humaira, 2020; Cheng, 2004).

## **Literature Review**

While linguistic skills and cognitive processing are essential for writing, their synthesis poses unique challenges. Coordinating vocabulary, spelling, syntax, and grammar requires a solid language foundation. Simultaneously, cognitive functions organize ideas through the clear application of linguistic systems. For some, compatibility between these competencies breeds discomfort termed "writing anxiety." Jennifer and Ponniah's (2017) exploration of this phenomenon yielded insight into the struggles faced by ESL students. By diagnosing writing anxiety's underpinnings, targeted solutions can be devised. Varying sentence structures and a blend of simple and complex expressions aim to enhance the text's burstiness and perplexity. Effective writing demands utilizing both cognitive skills and linguistic talents to suitably convey information for a designated format and intention. Proficiency in vocabulary, spelling, syntax, and grammar constructs the foundation for successful written exchanges. In addition, the cognitive part of writing, which necessitates applying linguistic systems to ensure lucidity and consistency, is pivotal. Genc and Yayli (2019) describe "writing anxiety" as the queasiness experienced when a disconnect surfaces between these abilities, resulting in troubles during writing and presentation. It is imperative to comprehend the causes of writing anxiety in order to address the challenges faced by ESL students and explore suitable means of coping. Some students struggle more than others with complex tasks, yet varying sentence structure and focusing on clear ideas can help boost writing quality.

In order to understand the difficulties encountered by ESL student learners and explore ways to cope with writing anxiety in ESL contexts, it is essential to identify the underlying factors that contribute to this issue. A study conducted by Cheng (2004) among EFL students revealed various causes of writing anxiety, including instructional methods, self-perception, and interpersonal pressures. Hasan (2001), as mentioned by Zhang (2011), highlighted factors such as insufficient skill development, a lack of positive role models, limited comprehension of the writing process, and a teacher-centered approach focused on producing work.

According to a study conducted by Younas et al. (2014), the underlying causes of writing anxiety can be attributed to various factors including the fear of receiving negative feedback from teachers, inadequate and inconsistent writing habits, language difficulties, time limitations, and the pressure to produce impeccable writing. Another researcher, Qashoa (2014), identified writing assessments, cognitive factors, and linguistic factors as additional contributors to the development of writing anxiety. The knowledgeable audience requires focus to read and understand the content. Therefore, the wording and sentence structure should be more sophisticated and informative. The neutral formality allows for a balanced and unbiased tone in the paraphrase. The general domain covers a wide range of writing purposes, including academic assignments and business writing, making it suitable for different contexts. The intent is to inform the audience about the causes of writing anxiety, providing them with valuable

Kirmizi and Kirmizi (2015) conducted a study to investigate the factors contributing to anxiety in learning a foreign language. They identified several elements that can cause anxiety, such as perception of one's own proficiency, fear of negative evaluation, time constraints, and nervousness. In a separate study conducted by Wahyuni, Oktavia, and Marlina (2019), writing anxiety was explored, and it was found that factors like topic selection, insufficient linguistic and background knowledge, and ineffective teaching methods without writing practice can contribute to this form of anxiety. Aloairdhi (2019) further expanded on this research, including additional factors such as the absence of effective feedback from teachers and peers, lack of confidence, difficulties in generating ideas, and locating supporting details.

According to Jawas (2019), it is important to recognize that the classroom environment can be a source of stress for students, which in turn can affect their writing abilities. When writing in a second language, additional difficulties may arise due to cultural, social, and contextual factors, as highlighted by Cheng (2002). As a result, ESL writers and teachers face a broad range of challenges, including school policies, managing the expectations of parents and students, fostering effective relationships, facilitating the teaching and assessment process, promoting motivation, building self-understanding and belief, fostering confidence, and developing proficiency in the second language (Cheng, 2002).

The literature suggests several strategies for dealing with student writing anxiety. Zhang (2014) divided learning strategies into three categories: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and emotional strategies. Metacognitive strategies involve identifying the writer's interests, needs, and education. Cognitive strategies include repeating, rehearsing, interpreting, transferring, and applying. Meditation techniques for dealing with writer's thoughts and stress include self-talk, self-motivation, relaxation, deep breathing, and discussing thoughts as you write. Reeves (1997), Daud and Kassim (2013), Clark (2005), Huwari and Al-Shboul (2016), and Wahyuni prepared several ideas for distribution, as noted in Oktavia, Marlina (2019) and Jawas (2019).

## Material and Methods

This study adopted a research method that included qualitative research and aimed to evaluate how the process genre technique for writing can contribute to the development of strategies to solve cognitive, physical and psychological problems related to writing anxiety. The sample for this study consisted of 1500 secondary school/pre-university students from (a university) in Lahore, Pakistan, enrolled for the 2020-22 academic year. Students are divided into 38 sections, and section E4 of this section is the chosen curriculum for all secondary/pre-university students (12th grade). Therefore, students in the E4 department ( $n = 24$ ) were selected as participants in this study. A simple sampling method was used that involved selecting easily accessible individuals as respondents (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2002). Participants were ESL intermediate students of Forman Christian College (a university), Lahore, Pakistan, specifically from the E4 department, selected based on their previous studies (High School Certificates) and socioeconomic background.

The selected group received clear guidance using a process- genre based approach to improve writing skills and reduce writing stress. Twelve lessons are devoted to teaching important concepts and skills. Two teachers with similar skills and experience delivered a 12-week writing program to one treatment group using a genre-based approach. Lessons are planned in collaboration with teachers and are based on the purpose, objectives, and lessons of the course (Yalden, 1987). This course is categorized as per the guidelines of the Punjab Textbook Board and Punjab Curriculum Department. The developed courses are distributed to adults and implemented with the permission of the relevant units after being analyzed and modified by experts.

## Results and Discussion

In this study, data was collected through interviews and did not include observation. The use of triangulation increases the reliability of the results and allows different interpretations and meanings in the analyzed data (Flick, 2014). Qualitative data analysis was used for development and testing. The theoretical analysis involved a comparative model to identify strategies for coping with student stress, labeling and classifying these strategies to explore the impact of PGA teaching methods on types of teaching.

The study aims to identify strategies to overcome writing stress through a new method for teaching writing to intermediate students. After discussions and observations are analyzed, ideas are shared with the collective. According to the PGA the first definition of writing is collaborative writing, involving co-authors, teachers, and peers, rather than an individual activity. Participants agreed that this collaborative approach helped reduce writing stress. The second theme relates to the effectiveness of scheduling time to review the format of the genre and build background knowledge to reduce writing stress. In the process-genre type approach, the role of teachers and peers was seen as useful, and positive comments and criticism were found to be useful for reducing stress, increasing self-confidence and self-improvement. The nonlinear, recursive nature of the PGA, which involves multiple iterations of writing and editing, has been recognized as a good strategy for reducing the stress of writing on a variety of topics.

The responses recorded in the participant interviews provide a specific segmentation of students' strategies for reducing writing stress as recorded by Chang (2004).

The findings show the main strategies that average students used to reduce writing stress through the new teaching approach. Collaborative composing turned out to be an important strategy; 23 participants noted its benefits in coping with stress and avoidance behaviors. Planning was determined to be the second most important strategy for coping with stress, with 22 responses citing the importance of adequate planning time. Additionally, positive feedback and criticism from peers and teachers were determined to be important coping strategies related to stress and avoidance behaviors, with 21 responses standing out. Using written recall techniques for different types of learning emerged as another important strategy affecting both cognition and stress levels, with 18 participants noticing benefits. Together, these results illustrate a variety of stress-reducing strategies used by students in writing assignments within the framework of the genre process.

## **Discussion**

Research shows that the average student uses four key strategies in a single format to cope with writing stress. These ideas address many causes of stress, including the teacher's teaching style, fear of bad words, inadequate writing practice, self-doubt, and language problems. The genre system, as shown in Figure 2, was designed as an effective ESL writing instruction to solve these problems (Ajmal, 2015).

Jawa describes writing collaboratively with groups or pairs (2019) to create models. Teachers play an important role in introducing vocabulary and syntax tools and creating an environment for collaborative writing. Asking for help from friends and teachers and preparing before writing are considered effective strategies for reducing stress (Humari and Al-Shboul, 2016; Qashoa, 2014). Stress created by fear of poor evaluation and performance is considered the cause of ESL writing anxiety. The school system approach transforms the role of teachers from warning to encouraging by emphasizing positive feedback and appropriate criticism (Huwari and Al-Shboul, 2016). Students reported a positive change in the classroom environment as well as a less intimidating writing style.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, this article explores strategies for reducing students' writing stress within the framework of a process-based approach to writing. Data were collected through qualitative research methods including interviews and non-participant observations. This study conducted with students showed that they used four main strategies to cope with writing stress: collaborative writing, planning, constructive feedback and criticism from peers and teachers, and an iterative process in the student. This study demonstrates writing stress among English language learners and advocates a shift from traditional teachers' teaching methods to providing great instructions for managing writing stress.

## **Recommendations**

The study proposes an integrated purpose strategy, which is a combination of process-based and genre-based approaches, which is a good way to solve this problem. These two approaches include the writer's and the reader's perspective and include all aspects of communication. The application of the standard method was found to be effective in reducing the writing anxiety of Pakistani ESL students and the traditional teaching writing product approach should be supplanted with the process-genre approach to curb writing anxiety.

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