# A Study on the Nature of Writing Apprehension among Saudi Undergraduate EFL Students

**Mohammad H. Al-khresheh[*], Amr M. Mohamed, Rim Al Basheer Ben Ali**

Northern Border University, Arar, Saudi Arabia

**Abstract**
Writing apprehension is an overwhelming feeling of stress and anxiety when writing in a foreign language. In the past ten years, it has been a hot topic of debate. Due to its influence on writing quality, this study aimed to investigate this topic among a group of university EFL students, measuring the level of this apprehension and identifying its main factors. To accomplish this objective, 137 Saudi EFL students were given a questionnaire containing 26 statements spanning four essential writing apprehension factors on a five-point Likert scale. The results indicated that Saudi EFL students generally received moderate writing apprehension. Negativity towards writing was the furthermost common factor of writing apprehension. Self-efficacy in writing was regarded as the least apprehensive factor compared to other writing apprehension factors. The potential causes of this apprehension in each factor were addressed. Statistically significant gender and university level differences were found favouring males and beginner university levels for negativity towards writing. Based on these findings, limitations and future study recommendations are suggested.
**Keywords:** *Apprehension, Saudi EFL Students, Self-Efficacy, Negativity and Positivity towards Writing, L2 Writing*

**Introduction**
During the 21st century, English has established itself as the global language of "science and technology and the language of the internet and communication" (Ashraf, 2018, p. 134). English has taken on a special significance in Saudi Arabia and is now one of the core academic disciplines. It is instructed as a foreign language (FL) (Al-khresheh, 2020a). English as a foreign language (EFL) students must develop their reading, vocabulary, speaking, listening, and writing skills to communicate successfully in English. Other receptive and productive skills can be developed via productive skills like writing. It is alleged to be crucial to one's intellectual development and job preparedness (Asmari, 2013;

Kelly et al., 2022; Waer, 2021). It is worth noting that writing is the ability that allows us to convey our thoughts, desires, feelings, and plans. However, EFL learners face particular challenges in developing their writing skills. Writing apprehension, or the anxiety and fear associated with writing, is commonly acknowledged to have a detrimental impact on students' writing abilities (Al-khresheh, 2020b; Cobourne & Shellenbarger, 2019, Morali & Boran, 2021). Students who learn to write in an FL confront numerous difficulties because it is a challenging and competitive skill.

According to Qadir et al. (2021), highly apprehensive writers will perform tasks poorly and inefficiently. Writing may be difficult and unpleasant for students with high apprehension levels (Kelly & Gaytan, 2020; Shang, 2022). On the other hand, low apprehensive writers are pretty confident and like writing. According to Pourfeiz (2022), one of the most significant difficulties students encounter is writing apprehension, and they frequently experience anxiety when it comes to writing. Students taking writing classes in an FL often worry that the assignments will be too difficult. A student's high level of anxiety or apprehension can frequently lead to discouragement, resulting in negative attitudes toward writing (Al Asmari, 2013; Baskan, 2021; Shang, 2022). It should be noted that students' writing achievement suffers due to their high level of anxiety, as does their mastery of the FL. As a result, exploring the sources of writing apprehension amongst EFL learners is deemed necessary. This study will delve deeply into the nature of writing apprehension experienced by Saudi EFL students. It aims to give teachers and students awareness of various methods for identifying levels of writing apprehension, determining its root causes, and offering remedial strategies to avoid its adverse effects. Emphasis should be devoted to preventing the sources of writing apprehension, as opposed to treating its manifestations after they have emerged, and a quantitative approach can help with this. Therefore, this study is set out to answer the following questions:

**RQ1:** To what extent do Saudi EFL students feel apprehensive when writing in English?

**RQ2:** What is the prevalent factor contributing to the writing apprehension of Saudi EFL students?

**RQ3:** Do Saudi EFL students' gender and university level influence their writing apprehension?

## Literature Review

Improving students' writing skills is important to language learning and development. However, many students find writing to be a difficult task. Besides, they regard writing as a terrifying experience (Olivier & Olivier, 2016; Watson Todd & Towns, 2021). According to Bahşi and Ateş (2021), some students perceive writing as an unpleasant, demanding, and fear-provoking experience. The researchers called this situation 'writing apprehension', one of the students' most critical challenges when learning an FL. Stephens et al. (2023) reported that writing apprehension impedes acquiring writing proficiency. Teachers must learn how to address the issue of writing apprehension. Elif and Yayli (2019) assert that teachers should be aware of the effects of students' writing apprehension and work to alleviate it. Concern about writing in various environments has been studied from different perspectives (Allen, 1985; Ekmekçi, 2018; Kim, 2006; Kostić-Bobanović, 2016; Liu, 2020; Masriani et al., 2018; Smith, 1984). Over the past few decades, many studies have tried pinpointing the definition of

'writing apprehension'. Writing apprehension is a concept coined by Daly and Miller (1975). As described by Daly (1978), writing apprehension is a condition- and a content-specific individual transformation that focuses on how people generally approach and avoid writing. Various phrases, including 'composition anxiety,' 'writing anxiety,' and 'writer's block,' have been coined to express the apprehension of putting pen to paper (Qadir et al., 2021). Rose (1984) defined writing apprehension as 'writer block,' which has a negative impact on students' writing skills. Writing apprehension prevents writers from effectively communicating their message. When given a writing assignment, some researchers used writing apprehension to describe students' feelings and beliefs (Smith, 1984). When asked to write, those students experience more significant anxiety than usual (Aljafen, 2013; Aytaç-Demirçivi, 2020). The nature of writing apprehension has lately been the subject of a line of research since many researchers felt it necessary to employ various implementations and tools. Likewise, EFL teachers would benefit from understanding writing apprehension in different contexts and educational levels. They can minimise and treat it. Both native and non-native speakers of the language can suffer from writing apprehension, as stated by Al Shboul and Huwari (2015). Students' lack of comfort with and passion for writing has been identified as a major barrier to academic success (Fischer & Meyers, 2017). Students' achievement can be affected positively or negatively by their level of writing apprehension (Aloairdhi, 2019; Daly & Miller, 1975; Geng & Wei, 2022). A variety of factors can contribute to writing apprehension. The core factors of writing apprehension are positivity or negativity toward writing, evaluation apprehension, and self-efficacy. Some scholars have studied the nature of writing apprehension and identified its factors. Previous studies suggest that writing apprehension can impede FL production and performance. These studies have been carried out to survey the influence of high levels of apprehension on students' writing competence and performance (Altukruni, 2019; Al-Qadri et al., 2023; Kim, 2006; Loureiro et al., 2020; Olivier & Olivier, 2016 Pourfeiz, 2022; Rauf & Khan, 2021; Baful & Derequito, 2022). Concerns about writing apprehension were the main focus of Al Shboul and Huwari's (2015) research on Jordanian EFL students completing their doctoral dissertations in Malaysia. Negative attitudes toward writing are one of four major themes that emerged in their qualitative investigation about writing apprehension reasons, English structure incompetence, past bad writing experience, and insufficient knowledge of academic writing. Researchers found that students generally feared writing assignments. Abdel Latif (2015) discovered that anxious students have trouble writing. He researched Egyptian students' English writing apprehension. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence pointed to the fear of criticism as a major cause of English writing apprehension among students. Recognising that writing apprehension might be linked to evaluation and assessment is essential. Salehi and Marefat (2014) showed a substantial correlation between high apprehension levels and evaluation. Students are typically anxious about tests and grades, negatively impacting their academic performance (Baful & Derequito, 2022). According to Aloairdhi (2019), assessment and lack of confidence were the predominant sources of writing apprehension. Kelly et al. (2022) suggested that good communication management in writing classrooms is necessary to support students in expanding their writing skills and overcoming their writing apprehension. Ismail and Heydarnejad (2023) discovered that self-assessment provides learners with the self-reliance to complete their assignments effectively. The cultivation of

student-centred assessment enhances student autonomy. In other words, when students are actively involved in the evaluation process, they can evaluate their performance without fear of being evaluated by others.

Waer (2021) suggested using automated writing evaluations to reduce student stress from instructors' assessments and evaluations. He studied how automated evaluation affects fearful writing and grammatical knowledge. Automated writing evaluation assisted apprehensive writers. Grammatical knowledge was much higher among EFL students who got automated evaluations. Giving immediate feedback using 'automated writing evaluation' creates an interesting learning environment for students with high writing apprehension (Mohammadi et al., 2023; Waer, 2021 & 2023).

Self-efficacy also affects writing apprehension. It is a person's consciousness of their ability to accomplish a given action (Baskan, 2021; Olivier & Olivier, 2016; Zhang et al., 2020). It is indeed vital in developing writing skills. Self-efficacy is a crucial aspect of language learning. It motivates students because it reflects their own belief in their abilities. Writing self-efficacy denotes to a learner's self-confidence in his writing skill. High self-efficacy persons use their writing opportunities more, put more effort into writing, are keener on improving their skills, and have superior writing performances (Baskan, 2021; Gaytan et al., 2022; Kelly & Gayten, 2020). As with general self-efficacy, stronger writing self-efficacy was anticipated to reduce apprehension and improve writing. Fischer and Meyers (2017) used the self-efficacy framework to study how an intensive writing course enhanced students' writing confidence and apprehension. Similarly, Sanders-Reio et al. (2014) studied pre-university students' writing apprehension and self-efficacy. Moreover, White (2022) compared the 'writing self-efficacy scale' and the 'Daly-Miller writing apprehension test' for middle school students. His study discovered a relationship between writing self-efficacy, apprehension, and performance. Besides, Mohammadi et al. (2023) examined the impact of different types of collaborative pre-writing on students writing. Teacher-led, peer-led, and individual pre-writing planning conditions were compared. Collaboration in pre-writing ensures students' fluency and cognitive engagement. They discovered that peer assessment is more effective than teacher or individual evaluation. As remedial strategies for apprehensive writers, collaborative and peer feedback must be improved. Later, researchers turned to quantitative toolkits to combat writing apprehension. Using scales, questionnaires, and interviews, they studied writing apprehension. For stance, Zaid (2011) discovered that multimedia concept mapping and web-based reading before writing impact students' compositions and reduce writing apprehension. In a similar vein, Aloairdhi (2019) cited evaluation, developing ideas, sentence structure, time constraints, and lack of self-confidence as potential causes of writing apprehension. In the same year, Zhang (2019) discovered that students are very apprehensive when participating in activities that call on productive skills, such as speaking and writing. He concludes that even at higher levels, teachers must be more conscious of their students' apprehension and work to lessen it. He claims that teachers undoubtedly significantly impact how their students develop. Teachers must therefore grasp the causes of writing apprehension and choose strategies to treat its consequences. Teachers must learn how to address the issue of writing apprehension. Professional development programs can help teachers acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to create a supportive writing environment that fosters student confidence and success (Al-khresheh et al., 2022).

Several studies, for instance, found statistically significant correlations between high levels of apprehension and writing difficulties. Qadir et al. (2021) found that EFL postgraduate students in North Cyprus experience moderate anxiety while writing in English. This apprehension level differed significantly due to educational level, gender and age. Other studies found that writing apprehension does not differ significantly by gender (Anggraini, 2017; Kostić-Bobanović, 2016). Reviewing these studies mentioned above reveals that there are different factors for writing apprehension. These factors were almost the same in all studies regardless of the specific reasons for each main writing apprehension factor. Therefore, the following main apprehension factors developed by Daly and Miller (1975), the 'positivity towards writing', 'negativity towards writing', 'evaluation apprehension', and lastly, 'self-efficacy and writing' constitute the conceptual framework of this study.

To sum up, this literature shows the importance of this topic on writing quality. Many studies investigated writing apprehension and its causes, while others offered remedial strategies. These studies agreed that writing apprehension is an issue for EFL students. Studying apprehension may alleviate concerns about foreign-language writing anxiety and heighten the understanding of curriculum designers, language teachers, and content developers. No one can deny that writing apprehension studies have increased. This concept has received little attention in the Saudi EFL content. Therefore, this study explores the nature of writing apprehension from a new perspective. It can help teachers and students understand writing apprehension. It seeks to assist teachers and students in understanding this writing difficulty and equip them with solutions to tackle such a problem.

## The Study

This study sought to determine the level of apprehension faced by a group of Saudi EFL students while writing. Furthermore, it also aimed to find out the most prevalent factor of writing apprehension taking into account independent variables such as students' gender and university level. To achieve these objectives, the descriptive quantitative approach was employed in this study. It was followed because it aids in developing a thorough understanding of the research problem. This method also permits a more comprehensive study with a bigger sample size, which improves the generalizability of the findings and increases the study's objectivity and clarity (Babbie, 2005; Gay & Airasian, 2005; Omair, 2014).

## Method

### Participants

The study's participants were 137 English-majoring university students from Saudi Arabia (51 males and 86 females). They were chosen using a stratified random sample technique from each university level because they fall into four categories. By dividing a population into smaller sections, or 'strata,' a stratified random sampling procedure can be carried out. Stratified sampling provides reasonably accurate estimates for all subgroups relevant to your research question (Omair, 2014; Taherdoost, 2016). Before enrolling in the English programme, the participants had over eight years of classroom English instruction. In terms of their language and social backgrounds, they are regarded as a homogeneous group. They

regard Arabic to be their mother tongue. The students were enrolled in the first semester of 2021-2022. The demographic data for the participants is shown in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1**
*Demographic Data*
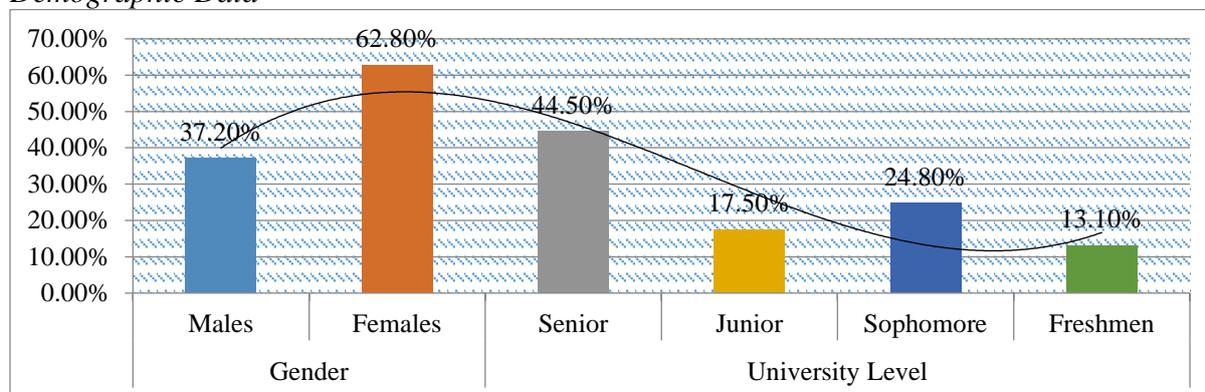


*Instrument*

The "Daly and Miller writing apprehension questionnaire" served as this study's main data collection instrument (Daly & Miller, 1975). Later, this instrument was subsequently amended by Cornwell and McKay (2000), and its validity and reliability were evaluated in several studies (Qadir et al., 2021; Todd, 2003; Zaid, 2009). This instrument consists of 26 statements using a Likert-type scale with the subsequent criteria: (1) 'strongly agree,' (2) 'agree,' (3) 'Neutral,' (4) 'disagree,' and (5) 'strongly disagree'. As shown in Table 1, these 26 statements are split into four critical factors contributing to writing apprehension.

**Table 1**
*Classification of Writing Apprehension Questionnaire's Items*

| Factors | Statements |
|---|---|
| 'Positivity towards writing' | 1, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 15, 17, 19 |
| 'Negativity towards writing' | 7, 13, 14, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26 |
| 'Evaluation apprehension' | 2, 4, 6, 25 |
| 'Self-efficacy and writing' | 11, 12, 20 |

Due to the fact that this study was conducted in a different context, the content was modified; thus, the validity and reliability of this instrument were re-established, as stated in the analysis section of this study.

*Data Collection*

As previously stated, the questionnaire was distributed during the first semester of the academic year 2021-2022. The questionnaire was administered online using a Google form, making it easier to collect and process the results. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants over a three-week period. The English language programme at Northern Border University was used to gather data. The participants were given an accurate description of the main research objective on the first page of the questionnaire, at the top. Before participating in the study, all participants proffered their informed consent, which was entirely voluntary. Similarly, it was agreed that all data would be considered secret and used only to further the research's objectives.

## Results

Specific statistical procedures were followed in light of the study's research objectives and questions. Frequency and percentage descriptions of the study population's characteristics were used. The questionnaire's validity was determined using Pearson correlation coefficients. Cronbach's alpha was also used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. Means, standard deviations, an independent sample T-test, and a one-way ANOVA were also used. This section depicts the findings of both the pilot study and the main study's statistical analysis.

### The Results of the Pilot Study

The study's instrument was tested on a pilot sample of 30 students to ensure the questionnaire's validity and reliability. The questionnaire's validity relates to its ability to examine what it was supposed to measure (Babbie, 2005). To ensure that, it was possible to infer two ways to verify its validity: interrater validity or 'content validity' and 'internal consistency validity' by determining the 'Pearson correlation coefficient' between the statements and the degree of each dimension individually.

The instrument was presented to a panel of EFL specialists to re-establish the content validity and ensure it fits the study's aims. They were instructed to avoid duplicating statements, check that all items belonged to the appropriate dimensions, and check the accuracy of the language used. In light of the experts' recommendations, any statements with an agreed percentage of 80% or above among the experts were preserved as belonging to the dimensions. There were no items removed. A few words here and there have been adjusted. The indicators of construct validity for the questionnaire statements have also been substantiated. This is done to ensure the accessibility of the questionnaire's statistical validity following incorporating the experts' adjustments to the instrument. Each statement's degree has been correlated with the dimension's overall degree using a Pearson correlation coefficient. Table 2 depicts correlation coefficients between each statement's degree and the dimension's total degree.

**Table 2**
*Person Correlation Coefficients between Statement Scores and Dimension Totals*

| 'Positivity towards writing' | | 'Negativity towards writing' | | 'Evaluation apprehension' | | 'Self-efficacy and writing' | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item No | Correlation | Item No | Correlation | Item No | Correlation | Item No | Correlation |
| 1 | .722** | 1 | .898** | 1 | .704** | 1 | .871** |
| 2 | .817** | 2 | .783** | 2 | .906** | 2 | .893** |
| 3 | .830** | 3 | .858** | 3 | .867** | 3 | .768** |
| 4 | .842** | 4 | .879** | 4 | .908** | | |
| 5 | .809** | 5 | .756** | | | | |
| 6 | .855** | 6 | .770** | | | | |
| 7 | .826** | 7 | .816** | | | | |
| 8 | .776** | 8 | .826** | | | | |
| 9 | .840** | 9 | .726** | | | | |
| | | 10 | .778** | | | | |

Table 2 shows that the correlation coefficients are high and statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating the strength of the internal consistency between each dimension of the study instrument and the items to which it belongs. This finding provides further evidence for

the validity of the questionnaire employed in this study. To test the reliability coefficient, Cronbach's alpha (α) was determined for each factor individually. The outcomes are detailed in Table 3.

**Table 3**
*Cronbach Alpha Coefficient*

| Factors | No. of items | Cronbach Alpha |
|---|---|---|
| 'Positivity towards writing' | 9 | 0.81 |
| 'Negativity towards writing' | 10 | 0.78 |
| 'Evaluation apprehension' | 4 | 0.76 |
| 'Self-efficacy and writing' | 3 | 0.74 |
| Total | 26 | 0.83 |

The statistics in Table 3 display that the overall Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.83. The coefficient correlations were higher than the minimum allowed dependability of 0.6, ranging from 0.74 to 0.81. It can be said that the questionnaire is very reliable and can be used on the study sample.

*The Results of the Main Study*
The instrument's items were rated on a five-point Likert scale, as was previously mentioned. These grades were converted to be within 1-5 degrees to assess the degree of writing apprehension. The degree was then split into five groups: 'very low' (1-1.79), 'low' (1.80-2.59), 'moderate' (2.60-3.39), 'high' (3.40-4.19), and 'very high' (4.20-5). The questionnaire, which evaluates writing apprehension among Saudi EFL students in the following factors: 'positivity toward writing', 'negativity toward writing', 'evaluation apprehension', and 'self-efficacy and writing', was analysed for means and standard deviations for each factor. Table 4 below lists the factors of the questionnaire in descending order by means.

**Table 4**
*Descriptive Analysis for the Writing Apprehension Factors*

| Factors | Items | Mean | Std. | Apprehension Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 'Negativity towards writing' | 10 | 3.21 | 0.64 | moderate | 1 |
| 'Evaluation apprehension' | 4 | 2.85 | 0.56 | moderate | 2 |
| 'Positivity towards writing' | 9 | 2.62 | 0.60 | moderate | 3 |
| 'Self-efficacy and writing' | 3 | 2.40 | 1.01 | low | 4 |
| Total | 26 | 2.86 | 0.43 | moderate | |

With an overall mean average of 2.86 and a standard deviation of 0.43, which is a value less than 1, it is revealed by Table 1 that the writing apprehension level among Saudi EFL students was moderate. This indicates that the study sample is homogeneous in their assessment of the level of writing apprehension.

The factor of 'negativity towards writing', with a mean of 3.21, a standard deviation of 0.64, and a moderate level, was the most prevalent factor contributing to writing apprehension among Saudi EFL students, followed by the factor of 'evaluation apprehension', with a mean of 2.85, a standard deviation of 0.56, and a moderate level. The 'self-efficacy and writing' factor placed nearly last, with a mean of 2.40, a standard deviation of 1.01, and a low level. The order of the writing apprehension factors among Saudi EFL students is depicted in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**
*The Order of Writing Apprehension Factors*
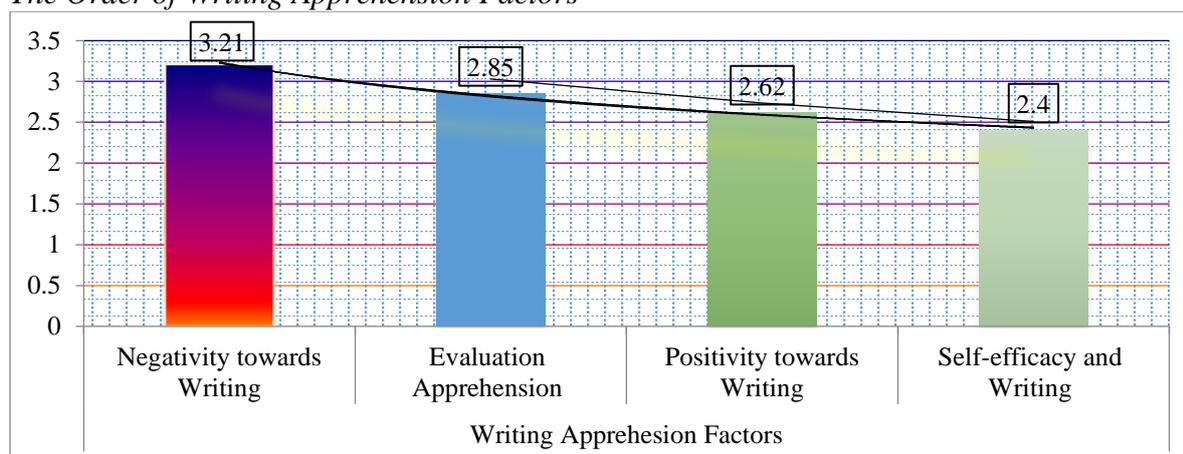


The following subsections separately discuss the factors to delve deeper into the amount of writing apprehension from the views of Saudi EFL students.

*Positivity towards Writing*
Means and standard deviations were determined for each questionnaire item in the first factor, which gauges writing apprehension through study sample participants' views about writing. Given that this factor contains nine statements, the mean was also determined on a general level. As indicated in Table 5, they are sorted in descending order.

**Table 5**
*Descriptive Analysis for Positivity towards Writing*

| No. | Items | Mean | SD | Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Item1 | 3.35 | 1.29 | moderate | 1 |
| 3 | Item5 | 3.27 | 1.32 | moderate | 2 |
| 4 | Item8 | 3.11 | 1.37 | moderate | 3 |
| 7 | Item15 | 2.45 | 1.12 | low | 4 |
| 5 | Item9 | 2.34 | 1.14 | low | 5 |
| 6 | Item10 | 2.34 | 1.15 | low | 6 |
| 2 | Item3 | 2.26 | 1.18 | low | 7 |
| 9 | Item19 | 2.25 | 1.12 | low | 8 |
| 8 | Item17 | 2.20 | 1.10 | low | 9 |
| Positivity towards writing | | 2.62 | 0.60 | moderate | |

Table 5 shows that the participants' level of writing apprehension in the positivity factor towards writing has a moderate level, with a mean of 2.62. Three items, or 33% of the total, received a moderate level of writing apprehension, and the remaining six items, or 66%, came with a low level, as measured by the factor of positivity towards writing. To summarise, the 'positivity towards writing' factor ranged from 2.20 to 3.35.

*Negativity towards Writing*
Analyses of means and standard deviations were performed on the entire questionnaire items included in the second factor, which evaluates the level of apprehension in the 'negativity towards writing' factor from the perspective of the study sample members. The mean was also estimated for this factor, which has ten statements. As can be seen in Table 6, they were ranked in descending order after being assembled.

**Table 6**
*Descriptive Analysis for Negativity towards Writing*

| No. | Items | Mean | SD | Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Item7 | 3.54 | 1.12 | high | 1 |
| 6 | Item21 | 3.47 | 1.13 | high | 2 |
| 9 | Item24 | 3.46 | 1.19 | high | 3 |
| 2 | Item13 | 3.38 | 1.20 | moderate | 4 |
| 7 | Item22 | 3.36 | 1.12 | moderate | 5 |
| 5 | Item18 | 3.35 | 1.12 | moderate | 6 |
| 4 | Item16 | 3.35 | 1.22 | moderate | 7 |
| 10 | Item26 | 3.11 | 1.28 | moderate | 8 |
| 8 | Item23 | 2.58 | 1.10 | low | 9 |
| 3 | Item14 | 2.49 | 1.06 | low | 10 |
| Negativity towards writing | | 3.21 | 0.64 | moderate | |

According to Table 6, the writing apprehension level in the 'negativity towards writing' factor from the study's participants' viewpoint was moderate, with a mean of 3.21. Regarding the distribution of items indicating the degree of writing anxiety in the 'negativity toward writing' factor, 30% of the total items were composed of statements with a high level. In comparison, 50% of the total items comprised moderately difficult statements. The remaining two items reached a low level, and the means of the items making up the factor of negativity towards writing ranged from 2.49-3.54.

*Evaluation Apprehension*
In the third factor, which measures the level of writing apprehension in the evaluation apprehension factor from the participants' perspective, all questionnaire statements' means and standard deviations were estimated. The overall mean was also calculated as only four statements in this factor. As can be seen in Table 7, they have been ranked from highest to lowest.

**Table 7**
*Descriptive Analysis for Evaluation Apprehension*

| No. | Items | Mean | SD | Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | Item4 | 3.50 | 1.27 | high | 1 |
| 4 | Item25 | 3.30 | 1.21 | moderate | 2 |
| 1 | Item2 | 2.31 | 1.12 | low | 3 |
| 3 | Item6 | 2.29 | 0.99 | low | 4 |
| Evaluation apprehension | | 2.85 | 0.56 | moderate | |

Table 7 demonstrates that the writing apprehension level in the 'evaluation apprehension' factor for the study sample members was moderate, with a mean score of 2.85. Regarding the arrangement of each item depicting the level of writing apprehension in the evaluation apprehension factor, one statement comprised a high percentage of 25% of the total items. In contrast, another statement comprised an average percentage of 25% of the total items. The level of the last two items was low. Altogether, the apprehension rating factors had mean scores between 2.29-3.50.

*Self-efficacy and Writing*
The fourth factor, which measures the degree of writing apprehension in self-efficacy and writing from the participants' opinion, had the means and standard deviations of all questionnaire statements measured. As this factor consists of three items, the mean was also determined. Table 8 shows how they were ranked in a decreasing sequence.

**Table 8**
*Descriptive Analysis for Self-efficacy and Writing*

| No. | Items | Mean | SD | Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | Item12 | 2.45 | 1.27 | low | 1 |
| 3 | Item20 | 2.43 | 1.14 | low | 2 |
| 1 | Item11 | 2.34 | 1.19 | low | 3 |
| Self-efficacy and writing | | 2.40 | 1.01 | low | |

The overall mean of writing apprehension in the study sample's 'self-efficacy and writing' factor was relatively low, as presented in Table 8, with a mean of 2.40. Each statement was allocated a low level in the self-efficacy and writing factor's arrangement of items reflecting the degree of writing apprehension. The mean of the items in this factor ranged between and 2.34-2.45.

*Gender-Based Differences*
Means and standard deviations of the degree of each questionnaire factor and the total score were analysed based on the gender variable. The significance of the differences between the means was revealed using the T-test to compare two independent means (Independent sample T-test), as shown in Table 9.

**Table 9**
*Statistical Analysis for Gender-based Differences among the Study's Participants*

| Factors | Gender | Mean | SD | DF | T | sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Positivity towards writing | Male | 2.67 | 0.57 | 135 | 0.741 | 0.460 |
| | Female | 2.59 | 0.61 | | | |
| Negativity towards writing | Male | 3.37 | 0.67 | 135 | 2.367 | 0.019* |
| | Female | 3.11 | 0.60 | | | |
| Evaluation apprehension | Male | 2.82 | 0.52 | 135 | -0.512 | 0.610 |
| | Female | 2.87 | 0.58 | | | |
| Self-efficacy and writing | Male | 2.27 | 1.06 | 135 | -1.210 | 0.228 |
| | Female | 2.48 | 0.98 | | | |
| Total | Male | 2.92 | 0.38 | 135 | 1.261 | 0.209 |
| | Female | 2.82 | 0.46 | | | |

*is significant at the 0.05 level

Table 9 shows no statistically significant gender differences in participants' responses to the statements of 'positivity toward writing,' 'evaluation apprehension,' 'self-efficacy and writing,' and total in general. However, there are statistically significant differences in the study sample members' responses regarding their views of 'negativity towards writing' according to the gender variable. These differences are in favour of males at level 0.05.

*University Level-based Differences*
One-way ANOVA analysis was used to determine the statistical differences between the means of the participants' responses about the writing apprehension level according to the university-level variable. Following are the ANOVA results, as shown in Table 10.

**Table 10**
*One-way ANOVA Analysis of Level-based Differences*

| Factors | Source | Type III Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 'Positivity towards writing' | Between Groups | 1.285 | 3 | .428 | 1.205 | .310 |
|  | Within Groups | 47.276 | 133 | .355 |  |  |
|  | Total | 48.561 | 136 |  |  |  |
| 'Negativity towards writing' | Between Groups | 3.900 | 3 | 1.300 | 3.316 | .022* |
|  | Within Groups | 52.130 | 133 | .392 |  |  |
|  | Total | 56.029 | 136 |  |  |  |
| 'Evaluation apprehension' | Between Groups | 3.106 | 3 | 1.035 | 3.513 | .017* |
|  | Within Groups | 39.201 | 133 | .295 |  |  |
|  | Total | 42.307 | 136 |  |  |  |
| 'Self-efficacy and writing' | Between Groups | 7.892 | 3 | 2.631 | 2.651 | .051 |
|  | Within Groups | 131.981 | 133 | .992 |  |  |
|  | Total | 139.873 | 136 |  |  |  |
| Total | Between Groups | .757 | 3 | .252 | 1.368 | .255 |
|  | Within Groups | 24.538 | 133 | .184 |  |  |
|  | Total | 25.295 | 136 |  |  |  |

*is significant at the 0.05 level

Table 10 displays no statistically significant differences at level 0.05 in the participants' responses due to their university-level variable on positivity toward writing, 'self-efficacy and writing,' and total in general. However, there are statistically significant differences of 0.05 between the participants' responses on 'negativity toward writing' and 'evaluation apprehension' at the university level. To determine differences, a post-test (LSD) was used. The differences are depicted in Table 11.

**Table11**
*Multiple Comparisons (LSD)*

| Factors | University level | Mean | Freshmen | Sophomore | Junior | Senior |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Negativity towards writing | Senior | 2.9667 | -0.31667 | -.49216-* | 0.17596 | - |
|  | Junior | 3.1426 | -0.14071 | -.31620-* | - | 0.17596 |
|  | Sophomore | 3.4588 | 0.17549 | - | .31620* | .49216* |
|  | Freshmen | 3.2833 | - | -0.17549 | -0.14071 | 0.31667 |
| Evaluation apprehension | Senior | 2.6944 | -0.18670 | -.34967-* | 0.07986 | - |
|  | Junior | 2.6146 | -.26656-* | -.42953* | - | 0.07986 |
|  | Sophomore | 3.0441 | 0.16297 | .- | .42953* | 34967* |
|  | Freshmen | 2.8811 | - | -0.16297 | .26656* | 0.18670 |

Table 11 above shows differences in 'negativity towards writing' between the senior and sophomore levels. This difference favours the sophomore level with a mean of 3.45. Regarding the 'evaluation apprehension' factor, the senior level outperforms the freshmen level with a mean of 2.88. Furthermore, there are differences between the junior and sophomore levels that favour sophomores with a mean of 3.04. Moreover, there are differences between the sophomore and the freshmen levels, where the mean was higher for sophomores at 3.04.

**Discussion**

The study found that Saudi EFL students had moderate writing apprehension. Four significant factors were explicitly linked to this apprehension, including 'negativity towards writing,' 'evaluation,' 'positivity towards writing,' and 'self-efficacy in writing'. The last factor showed low apprehension compared to the preceding three. A possible explanation for

such a finding might be that a lack of expertise typically explains such levels of apprehension, difficulties coming up with ideas, evaluation, inadequate practice, and grammar and spelling issues. The conclusions of other studies (Aljafen, 2013; Aloairdhi, 2019; Elif & Yayli, 2019; Ekmekçi, 2018; Kim, 2006; Masriani et al., 2018; Rezaei & Jafari, 2014) are consistent with this finding. Participants' positivity towards writing was moderately apprehensive. Learning always requires a positive attitude. Attitude and motivation are more important than aptitude (Olivier & Olivier, 2016). Motivation to pass writing courses and get good scores may explain why participants are positive about writing. Writing courses may be more engaging, so long-time writers acquire confidence and a positive outlook. Participants may like writing plainly and concisely, according to the study. This suggests a positive approach toward writing. Previous studies support these results (Fischer & Meyers, 2017; Qadir et al., 2021).

'Negativity toward writing' was also moderate among participants. This result indicates that participants' negativity towards writing dominates their writing apprehension. Writing is a challenging linguistic talent that develops over time. Some students may find writing in English culturally awkward. The significance of social relations in EFL and erroneous religious views are considered cultural causes for such apprehension. In addition, classroom practices, a lack of English structure knowledge, and a lack of academic writing expertise can all contribute to a negative attitude towards writing (Aloairdhi, 2019; Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2015).

The inability to come up with ideas may cause pessimism to develop, which will cause writing apprehension. Writing processes could be impacted if writing classes do not get enough time. Likewise, the Saudi school system emphasises grammar and spelling while teaching general English and writing skills, which were additional sources of writing apprehension. Research has shown that students worried about writing are less likely to write, have trouble expressing themselves in writing, do poorly in writing classes, and have negative attitudes towards writing overall (Aloairdhi, 2019; Liu, 2020; Olivier & Olivier, 2016). This outcome validated numerous research conclusions (Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2015; Aloairdhi, 2019; Abdel Latif, 2015; Rezaei & Jafari, 2014).

The study suggests Saudi EFL students may be judged less constructively than they want due to their evaluative writing concerns. Students' writing apprehension is influenced by how others perceive it in all four statements of the 'evaluation apprehension' factor. Maybe because of these four factors: Students' fears about grading systems, teachers' reactions to writing assignments, and negative comments can generate writing apprehension. Students may take writing criticism as self-criticism. Writing apprehension might be negatively associated with writing course grades. Thus, students' writing proficiency was highly correlated with their anxiety about evaluation. This supports several studies (Abdel Latif, 2015, 2019; Anggraini, 2017; Daly & Miller, 1975; Kim, 2006; Sanders-Reio et al., 2014; White, 2022). This factor affects self-efficacy, writing behaviour, and motivation. Unmotivated students may fear assessments. Students lack the enthusiasm to write and merely study to pass courses. Teachers must push students to overcome their fear of writing. Self-efficacy writing factor has low writing apprehension compared to the preceding three factors. There might be a relationship between self-efficacy and writing apprehension. Therefore, students with more self-efficacy had less writing apprehension. This study

validated earlier findings that writing apprehension is indirectly related to self-esteem, particularly self-efficacy (Aljafen, 2013; Aloairdhi, 2019; Kim, 2006; Singh & Rajalingam, 2012). Low writing self-efficacy may be caused by drive and interest in studying, which can improve students' writing comprehension. Self-development and determination are needed to improve English. Due to their self-confidence and self-motivation, seniors were less afraid of writing. This study outcome matches many others (Daly & Wilson, 1983; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2001; Singh & Rajalingam, 2012; White, 2022). The study showed no statistically significant gender differences in the participants' replies to the statements of 'positivity towards writing,' 'evaluation apprehension,' and 'self-efficacy and writing.' However, the participants' responses about how negatively they view writing differ statistically significantly depending on the gender variable. These differences are in men's favour. This outcome might be brought on by their extreme sensitivity to criticism and overcorrection, fear of making mistakes, and failure to balance their writing demands and their teachers. Compared to male students, female students may view their writing skills more favourably and be less apprehensive about writing evaluations. Male students may write authoritatively and actively, whereas female students may write passively. Although these results are consistent with some studies (Altukruni, 2019; Cheng, 2004; Cocuk et al., 2016), they are not consistent with other studies that revealed females to be more apprehensive than males when writing (Anggraini, 2017). Furthermore, the study discovered no statistically significant differences in the participants' responses based on their university-level variable on positivity toward writing and self-efficacy in writing. However, there are statistically significant differences in the responses of university participants to negativity toward writing and evaluation apprehension. These differences favoured beginner university levels such as freshmen and sophomores. Writing apprehension levels may decrease over time as students gain experience, develop their skills, and practice writing more than at other levels. This result contradicts earlier research that found no correlation between educational level and writing apprehension (Qadir et al., 2021; Loureiro et al., 2020; Kostić-Bobanović, 2016). Given this discussion, there are some limitations to this study. The first limitation is the sample size, which is comparatively small. Thus, the findings might not be applicable generally. To come up with more reliable and comprehensive conclusions, it is strongly advised that the sample population be increased to include students from various universities. The second limitation is that this study was carried out by a questionnaire to get students' viewpoints. It's likely that alternative tools, like observation or interviews, may have been utilised to get more accurate results. It is highly recommended that future studies use a semi-structured interview to examine the same topic from teachers' viewpoints.

*Pedagogical Implications*
Based on the current study's main findings, there is a need to design effective, easy-to-implement, and appropriate strategies that reduce levels of apprehension while motivating students to be more comfortable and eager to remove barriers to writing proficiency. Different pre-writing activities, such as free writing, concept mapping, and outlining, can help generate ideas and make writing easier for students, reducing their apprehension level. Creating a supportive learning environment that motivates and encourages students to write can also effectively reduce apprehension. This can be accomplished by incorporating

technology into writing instruction, which has been demonstrated to reduce student writing apprehension. Likewise, familiarising teachers with the main causes of writing apprehension identified in this study can also assist them in dealing with apprehensive writers. Therefore, teachers must be prepared to address their students' apprehension and provide individualised writing instruction that considers individual differences. Moreover, developing confidence in one's writing skills or motivation, taking breaks, obtaining assistance and feedback, and attempting to revise one's paper by encouraging peer evaluation or review is also crucial for reducing apprehension.

## Conclusion

The study indicated that, on average, Saudi EFL students had a moderate level of writing apprehension. Four factors of apprehension were identified and discussed: 'negativity towards writing,' 'evaluation apprehension,' 'positivity towards writing,' and 'self-efficacy and writing.' Although the first three factors elicited a moderate apprehension level, the fourth evoked a low level. Negativity towards writing was the most prevalent writing apprehension factor. The possible causes of this apprehension were provided. Statistically significant gender and university level differences were identified in favour of males and beginner university levels for negativity towards writing.

## Ethics Declarations
## Competing Interests
No, there are no conflicting interests.
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