

Writing Anxiety among EFL Doctoral Students in Algeria: A Case Study at the University of Tizi-Ouzou

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to measure the levels of writing anxiety experienced by EFL doctoral students, determine the sources of their nervousness, and uncover the strategies they use to deal with their apprehension. To determine the levels of writing anxiety, a five-point Likert questionnaire was administered to eighteen EFL doctoral students enrolled at the University of Tizi-Ouzou. In addition, two open-ended questions were designed: the first sought to examine the causes of writing anxiety and the second asked the respondents to reflect on the strategies they use to manage their writing apprehension. Quantitative data were treated using the SPSS program whereas qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The quantitative findings revealed that more than half of the participants experienced high levels of writing anxiety. The qualitative results exposed four main sources of writing anxiety and three anxiety-coping strategies.

Keywords: anxiety causes; anxiety-coping strategies; anxiety levels; EFL doctoral students; writing anxiety.

Jel Classification Codes: XN1, XN2.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Among the four language skills, writing can be a laborious task for students. Indeed, according to Rohmah and Muslim (2021), academic writing is a challenging task for native speakers and even more arduous for EFL students. One of the most important competencies that EFL students should possess is the ability to write different types of academic papers like research proposals, conference papers, journal articles, and dissertations/theses (Ho, 2016). This competence is even more important for students who are in the process of earning a doctorate degree. During their doctoral studies, students are required to write and publish different types of scholarly papers. In Algeria, writing a thesis and publishing at least one scholarly article in a high-ranked academic journal is a requirement for all doctoral students. However, during the writing process, doctoral students can face various obstacles that can prevent them from completing their scholarly papers and getting their degrees. Among these hurdles, anxiety is a prevalent phenomenon.

In general, anxiety means “distress or uneasiness of the mind caused by fear of danger or misfortune” (Suleimenova, 2013, p. 1860). That is to say, the general feeling of anxiety is characterized by a state of apprehension and worry when facing dangerous situations. In foreign language learning contexts, anxiety is regarded as a specific form of anxiety experienced by learners when learning a new language (Horwitz et al., 1986). It is one of the most important affective variables that can have adverse effects on language skills, including writing. This psychological attribute can have a debilitating effect on doctoral students’ writing practices.

The present study is set to address this relationship between anxiety and writing among EFL doctoral students. It aims to offer some insights into the anxiety experienced by EFL doctoral students at the University of Tizi-Ouzou when writing research papers, especially theses and journal articles. More specifically, the study strives to understand the writing anxiety phenomenon by measuring its levels, ascertaining its causes, and identifying students’ coping-strategies. In regards to the research objectives, the present study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do EFL doctoral students at the University of Tizi-Ouzou experience writing anxiety?
2. What are the causes of writing anxiety among EFL doctoral students at the University of Tizi-Ouzou?
3. How do EFL doctoral students at the University of Tizi-Ouzou deal with writing anxiety?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Anxiety and the Writing Skill

The term “writing anxiety” was first coined by Daly and Miller in 1975. According to Daly (1978), the writing apprehension construct “is concerned with a person’s general tendencies to approach or avoid situations perceived to demand writing accompanied by some amount of evaluation” (p. 10). In other words, people with writing anxiety have the tendency to avoid situations that require writing, especially when the produced written material is evaluated. Cheng (2004) considers writing anxiety as a complex psychological construct that consists of three components namely somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, and avoidance anxiety. Somatic anxiety

refers to the physical manifestations of anxiety such as feelings of nervousness and tension. In contrast, the cognitive aspect of anxiety represents mental manifestations such as worry about one's performance and preoccupation about the perception of others. Concerning avoidance anxiety, it occurs when learners display avoidance behaviors such as procrastination and skipping writing tasks whenever possible.

Writing anxiety is a prevalent problem among students at different educational levels (Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2015) and is negatively correlated with academic writing performance. It impedes students' academic writing process and influences their perceptions of writing tasks (Rohmah & Muslim, 2021). Daly (1978) stated that people who suffer from writing anxiety consider the writing process as an unrewarding experience and feel unusual levels of anxiety (Daly, 1978). Students with high levels of writing anxiety worry about negative evaluation, evade writing, and anticipate failure (Daly & Miller, 1975). Writing anxiety is also associated with academic procrastination. Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2001) claimed that "students with apprehension about writing may have procrastinated on writing assignments given fear of failure and perception that writing tasks are aversive. Such procrastination would increase students' apprehension and lead to more procrastination" (p. 562).

2.2. Writing Anxiety among Graduate Students

Since Daly and Miller's (1975) pioneering study, many researchers have investigated writing anxiety at different educational levels. Some researchers have explored the writing anxiety phenomenon among graduate students. Meng and Tseng (2013), for instance, looked at the anxiety experienced by two EFL Taiwanese graduate students when learning to write thesis proposals during their master's program. Observations, participants' reflections, and interviews were used to gather data. The analysis of the collected data showed that both participants experienced high levels of anxiety when writing the literature review section.

In another study, Al-Shboul and Huwari (2015) delved into the causes of writing apprehension from the perspective of twenty-one male Jordanian Ph.D. students writing their thesis in Malaysia. A qualitative case study by means of semi-structured interviews was employed. The findings exposed four main causes of writing apprehension that are lack of knowledge in English structure, negative attitude toward writing, negative writing experience in the past, and inadequate knowledge in academic writing. The researchers concluded that "writing apprehension was a prevalent phenomenon among the students" (Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2015, p. 535).

Ho's (2016) study explored the correlation between writing anxiety and self-efficacy among EFL graduate students in Taiwan. 54 second-year master's students, 97 junior doctoral students, and 67 senior doctoral students participated in the study. Two questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to collect the required data. The findings showed that the participants experienced a moderate level of research writing anxiety and were not highly self-efficacious about writing research papers. In addition, the study revealed that insufficient writing skills, time constraints, and fear of negative comments were among the causes of writing anxiety.

In the same year, Bazrafkan et al. (2016) investigated the causes of anxiety during thesis writing and the strategies used by sixteen Ph.D. students at the Iranian Universities of Medical Sciences to cope with this psychological problem. Semi-structured interviews and field

observations were used to gather data. Four main themes emerged that are thesis as a major source of stress, supervisor relationship, socioeconomic problems, and coping with stress and anxiety.

In a more recent study, Harahap and Syarif (2022) investigated the anxiety experienced by twenty EFL students at Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah Medan, in Indonesia, when writing the introduction of a thesis proposal. More specifically, the authors examined the levels, types, and causes of writing anxiety. In order to collect data, they relied on a questionnaire and an interview. The findings revealed that the majority of the students suffered from high anxiety, with cognitive anxiety being the dominant type of writing anxiety. The study results also indicated that students experienced writing anxiety due to low self-confidence, self-perception, and lack of knowledge.

The studies mentioned above focused on the writing anxiety experienced by graduate students overseas. In Algeria, most of the studies conducted on anxiety concentrated on finding a correlation between this psychological construct and the speaking skill (Melouah, 2013; Khaloufi Sellam, 2016; Berbar & Fodil, 2017; Amara, 2018; Berbar, 2019). The few studies conducted on writing anxiety (Khelalfa, 2018; Mandi & Benamer Belkacem, 2019) focused on undergraduate students. Therefore, this study intends to fill the gap in the existing literature by exploring writing anxiety among doctoral students in Algeria by taking the students in the department of English at the University of Tizi-Ouzou as a sample.

3. Method

3.1. Data Collection Instrument

To collect data, the present study relied on a questionnaire that comprised three main parts. The first part asked about students' personal data such as gender, degree held, length of enrollment in the doctoral program, and publication experience. The second part was a 20-item survey that assessed the levels of writing anxiety. The participants were asked to express the degree of their agreement or disagreement with each statement by choosing one of the five alternatives: "strongly agree", "agree", "neither agree nor disagree", "disagree", and "strongly disagree". In order to assess the internal consistency among the item, Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was calculated. Consistent with Dörnyei (2003), "if the Cronbach Alpha of a scale does not reach 0.60, this should sound warning bells" (p. 112). That is to say, a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.60 or lower means that the internal consistency of a research instrument is poor and unacceptable. The Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for the 20-item scale was 0.889. This indicates that the internal consistency of the scale is good and that the questionnaire is a reliable data collection tool. The third section comprised two open-ended questions that explored the causes of writing anxiety and the strategies used by the participants to reduce their writing apprehension.

3.2. Data Analysis Procedures

Two data analysis procedures were used to treat the gathered data. The first data analysis tool is a software widely used in Social Sciences to run different types of statistical analysis, which is the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). In the present study, SPSS version 26.0 was used to analyze the participants' background information as well as their responses to the close-ended items in the writing anxiety scale. Descriptive statistics were used to compute frequencies, percentages, and means. The respondents' personal data were calculated using

frequencies and percentages. The participants' responses to the writing anxiety survey were analyzed in terms of percentages and means. The second data analysis method employed was Thematic Analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). This qualitative data analysis method was used to examine the open-ended questions. More specifically, the participants' answers were coded and grouped into key themes.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. The Respondents' Demographic Data

All the participants in this study were EFL students pursuing a doctorate degree at the University of Tizi-Ouzou. The questionnaire was emailed to forty students. However, only eighteen questionnaire responses were sent back. The participants' demographic information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents' Profile

Participants' General Characteristics		Number of Students	Percentage
Gender	Male	1	5.6%
	Female	17	94.4%
Degree Held	Master	13	72.2%
	Magister	5	27.8%
Length of Enrollment in the Doctoral Program	Not stated	1	5.6%
	2 years	2	11.1%
	3 years	9	50.0%
	4 years	2	11.1%
	5 years	4	22.2%
Publication Experience	Not stated	1	5.6%
	0 paper	11	61.1%
	1 paper	1	5.6%
	2 papers	2	11.1%
	3 papers	2	11.1%
	4 papers	1	5.6%

Based on the information presented in Table 1, nearly all the participants are females (Seventeen out of eighteen) except for one student (5.6%). The data also showed that the majority of the respondents have a master's degree (72.2%) and half of them (50.0%) are third-year doctoral students. Despite being in the doctoral program for two to five years, the majority of the participants have no publication experience since eleven out of eighteen students (61.1%) have not published any paper yet.

4.2. Levels of Writing Anxiety

To determine the level of writing anxiety experienced by the participants, the survey scores were analyzed quantitatively for percentages and means. The findings are displayed in Table 2. The first column lists the scale items; the second column portrays the combinational percentages of students who agreed and strongly agreed with each item (A+SA); the third column outlines the

percentages of students who disagreed and strongly disagreed with the questionnaire statements (D+SD); the fourth column indicates neutral responses (N); the fifth column exhibits the mean score of each statement (M); and the last column specifies the level of anxiety. The interpretation of the levels of anxiety is based on the following mean scores:

1.00-1.50 = very low, 1.51-2.50 = low, 2.51-3.50 = moderate, 3.51- 4.50 = high, 4.51-5.00 = very high.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on the Questionnaire Items

Questionnaire Items	SA+A%	SD+D%	N%	M	Meaning
1. Thesis writing is an exhausting and stressful task.	88.9%	11.1%	0%	4.39	High
2. I worry about my thesis in my free time.	94.4%	5.6%	0%	4.11	High
3. My heart starts to pound when I think about my thesis.	50.0%	22.2%	27.8%	3.39	Moderate
4. When working on my thesis, my mind usually goes completely blank.	66.6%	16.7%	16.7%	3.61	High
5. I worry about miswriting any part of my thesis.	66.6%	5.6%	27.8%	3.67	High
6. I worry about receiving negative feedback from my thesis supervisor.	27.8%	61.1%	11.1%	2.72	Moderate
7. I worry about my inability to finish my thesis before the submission deadline date.	72.2%	16.7%	11.1%	3.94	High
8. I fret over the possibility that my thesis may not be evaluated as quality work.	64.7%	17.6%	17.6%	3.53	High
9. The process of writing a thesis is so challenging and stressful that I have the tendency to procrastinate.	66.7%	11.1%	22.2%	3.61	High
10. I am usually nervous when writing and sending a paper for possible publication in a scholarly research journal.	33.3%	27.8%	38.9%	3.06	Moderate
11. When writing a scholarly research article, I worry about peer reviewers' negative evaluation.	55.5%	16.7%	27.8%	3.44	Moderate
12. When writing an article for publication, I stress over the possibility of it being rejected.	72.2%	22.2%	5.6%	3.67	High
13. I panic when I have to write a research paper under time constraints.	72.2%	22.2%	5.6%	3.61	High
14. When writing a research paper, I feel so apprehensive that I have trouble putting my thoughts into words.	55.5%	22.2%	22.2%	3.56	High

15. I worry that the way I express and organize my ideas does not comply with the rules of academic writing.	50.0%	33.3%	16.7%	3.28	Moderate
16. I am afraid I won't be able to summarize and paraphrase others' ideas properly.	38.9%	38.9%	22.2%	2.94	Moderate
17. I am afraid that I cannot cite academic sources appropriately.	33.3%	44.4%	22.2%	2.94	Moderate
18. I worry about making grammatical errors when writing research papers.	22.2%	66.7%	11.1%	2.61	Moderate
19. I don't write as well as most other scholars in my field and this makes me anxious.	44.4%	11.1%	44.4%	3.56	High
20. I always worry about the quality of my academic writing.	61.1%	5.6%	33.3%	3.78	High

Table 2 shows that among the twenty items, twelve statements generated high anxiety and eight items produced moderate anxiety. The top three items reflected anxiety while writing a doctoral thesis. Indeed, the three highest mean scores are for item 1 "Thesis writing is an exhausting and stressful task" (M=4.39), item 2 "I worry about my thesis in my free time" (M=4.11), and item 7 "I worry about my inability to finish my thesis before the submission deadline date" (M=3.94). The majority of the students experienced high anxiety because completing a thesis of at least 250 pages within their doctoral candidacy period can be a challenging process, especially for novice writers and researchers. This anxiety amplifies when students worry about thesis submission deadline dates. Another item that produced high anxiety among the respondents is item 12 "When writing an article for publication, I stress over the possibility of it being rejected" with a mean score of 3.67. Apart from writing a thesis, Algerian doctoral students are required to publish at least one article in a highly ranked periodical. The publication process can be even more stressful and lengthy if the sent article is rejected by peer reviewers. The participants' apprehension can also be justified by the fact that more than half of them (61.1%) have not published any paper that will allow them to graduate. It can be concluded that worrying about completing the doctoral thesis on time and having a published article can be an overwhelming experience for many doctoral students.

The top three statements that produced moderate anxiety are item 11 "When writing a scholarly research article, I worry about peer reviewers' negative evaluation" (M=3.44), item 3 "My heart starts to pound when I think about my thesis" (M=3.39), and 15 "I worry that the way I express and organize my ideas does not comply with the rules of academic writing" (M=3.28). The peer-reviewing process is an important step to ensure high-quality publications. However, receiving negative feedback can be a source of anxiety for doctoral students who are trying to get their first paper published. In the present study, 55.5% of the respondents suffered from what is called cognitive anxiety because they feared the negative feedback of peer reviewers. Peer reviewers can reject the paper or ask the author to do major revisions before it can be accepted for

publication. This can lengthen the publication process, postpone graduation, and increase the levels of students' anxiety. Besides peer reviewers' negative comments, 64.7% of the participants were concerned about the negative evaluation of the thesis board. In Algeria, once the thesis is completed, it is sent to internal and external examiners who write reports in which they approve or reject the submitted work. In case the thesis is rejected, students have to revise it, rewrite different sections, and resubmit it for another written evaluation. This can delay graduation and cause more anxiety. However, 61.1% of the students rejected item 6 and indicated that they were not nervous to get negative feedback from the thesis supervisor. This can be justified by the fact that the participants viewed the supervisor as a guide that will help them improve the quality of their work. Similarly, one of Ho's (2016) participants stated that "my supervisor's comments helped me see the weaknesses of my paper... as long as I make revisions accordingly, things usually turn out fine" (p. 34). The findings presented in Table 2 also revealed that the respondents experienced somatic anxiety since half of them (50%) felt their hearts beating fast when they thought about their theses. According to Harahap and Syarif (2022), "The learners who are anxious in writing a second or foreign language structure will experience somatic illnesses like sweating, shaking, increased heartrate, headache, and speedy breathing" (p. 229). The same percentage of students (50%) worried that the way they write down their ideas is not in conformity with the rules of academic writing. Students can experience anxiety when they are unfamiliar with the principles of academic writing. This finding is in line with the results of Al-Shboul and Huwari (2015) who found that inadequate knowledge in academic writing was one of the major sources of writing anxiety among Jordanian Ph.D. students.

What is worth mentioning is that besides somatic anxiety and cognitive anxiety, the study respondents suffered from avoidance anxiety. Indeed, 66.7% of them indicated that they tend to postpone or avoid working on their theses because they find the writing process demanding and stressful. In this case, academic procrastination can be viewed as a coping mechanism to evade this stressful experience.

In order to measure the levels of anxiety and answer the first research question, the SPSS software was used to compute the mean score of each respondent. The results produced three anxiety groups that are high anxiety, moderate anxiety, and low anxiety. The number and percentage of students in each anxiety category are provided in Table 3 along with the minimum and maximum means.

Table 3. Students' Levels of Anxiety

Anxiety Levels	Number of Students	Percentage	Minimum Mean	Maximum Mean
High	11	61.1%	3.55	4.30
Moderate	06	33.3%	2.70	3.45
Low	01	5.6%	2.10	2.10

Table 3 shows that eleven students (61.1%) out of eighteen suffered from high anxiety with a maximum mean of 4.30. Students who experienced moderate anxiety were six (33.3%) with a maximum mean of 3.45. Only one student (5.6%) reported low anxiety with a mean score of 2.10. Based on the finding presented in Table 3, it can be concluded that more than half of the respondents had high levels of writing anxiety. The same findings were reached by Harahap and

Syarif (2022) who found that among the twenty participants, twelve suffered from high anxiety, six had moderate anxiety, and two felt low writing anxiety.

4.3. Causes of Writing Anxiety

The first open-ended question of the questionnaire asked the participants to state the causes of their writing apprehension. The gathered data were grouped into four main themes. The first cause of writing anxiety mentioned by the participants was the lack of time devoted to writing. The majority of the study respondents are full-time or part-time teachers and some of them are married with children. Therefore, balancing multiple responsibilities aside from writing a thesis and publishing a research article cannot be easy for students who are enrolled in a doctoral program. The participants of the present study did not prioritize academic writing due to their personal and professional duties, and this amplified the levels of their writing anxiety. The following assertions exemplify this point.

My writing anxiety stems from the lack of time I have to dedicate to writing. My daily life influences my writing progress. Being a mother of four children is not easy, but it is a burden on my shoulders which affects my writing process. So my entire time is not devoted to writing. In addition, being a part-time teacher at the university is another responsibility that prevents me from working on my thesis.

I am nervous because I don't have much time to devote to writing. Besides my work days as a full-time teacher, I have to take care of the house and my children. It has been three years since my enrollment and I am still in the literature review chapter and have no published article for my graduation.

This result is consistent with one of the findings reached by Bazrafkan et al. (2016). In the third theme "socioeconomic problems", the authors located several sub-categories and among them the busy life of Ph.D. students. Indeed, "PhD students usually have busy lives and different problems and situations of life such as marriage, childbearing, and working to earn income while studying. These cause problems that reduce their psychological capacity to cope" (Bazrafkan et al., 2016, p. 235). No matter how busy doctoral students are, they should manage to find at least a little time to write every day if they want to graduate.

The second source of writing anxiety is related to the thesis supervisor. According to Mhunpiew (2013), "The success of a thesis or a dissertation for a graduate student relies upon the roles of their supervisor" (p. 119). The role of the supervisor is important for doctoral candidates in the sense that he/she provides them with academic guidance, assistance when challenges arise, and informative feedback. However, the study respondents complained about the thesis supervisor's lack of availability, guidance, support, and feedback. The following declarations illustrate this point.

I am anxious because I feel alone in this journey. I have no support from my supervisor and it takes him a lot of time to respond to my emails and send me his feedback. When I finally receive his feedback, it is usually vague and he corrects only grammatical and punctuation mistakes. I know that he is very busy but at least he should inform me whether I am on the

right path or not because when I receive his feedback I feel even more lost and anxious than before.

The reason for my writing anxiety is my supervisor. I have no supervision meeting with him and when I ask for one, he is always unavailable. I met with him only twice since I started my doctorate three years ago. It doesn't mean that I accuse him of not progressing, but being involved with my children and work made my supervisor not worry about my thesis.

Likewise, one of Bazrafkan et al.'s (2016) study outcomes regarding the causes of Ph.D. students' thesis writing anxiety was the nature of supervision. The participants complained about the supervisor's workload, ineffective evaluation, and lack of feedback. Bazrafkan et al.'s (2016) stated that "Because of the lack of time, thesis supervisors are unable to properly guide the students as well as carry out their regular duties" (p. 235).

Another reported source of writing anxiety was students' perfectionist tendencies. Perfectionist students are concerned about errors and the quality of their writing, have low self-confidence in their writing abilities, have the tendency to procrastinate, and suffer from writing anxiety. The participants of the present study claimed that they have the tendency to pay attention to every single detail and set high expectations when writing scholarly papers. One of the students acknowledged that "When writing, I want everything to be perfect from my writing to grammar and punctuation. I tend to write and rewrite and rewrite and I am never satisfied. It is frustrating and stressful not to write well like others". Another student declared that:

I always try to be a good writer and this tendency to be perfect stresses me a lot. I sometimes fear not being as good as a writer should be. I sometimes tell myself maybe my thesis will be rejected due to the quality of my writing. I do not have confidence in my writing because I did not receive constructive feedback on my writing when I was a graduate master student, so I actually do not even know what my writing level is or what my weaknesses are.

These confessions support the findings obtained from questionnaire items 5, 19, and 20 since 66.6% of the students worried about miswriting any part of the thesis, 44.4% were anxious because they were convinced that they did not write as well as other scholars in their discipline, and 61.1% were concerned about the quality of their academic writing. The perfectionist nature of doctoral students can have a debilitating effect on their writing productivity and increase their levels of writing anxiety. Therefore, in order to overcome perfectionism and writing anxiety, students should stop listening to the inner voice telling them that everything they write should be perfect from the first try or that what they wrote is not good enough.

The last cause of writing anxiety is related to time constraints or deadlines. Since the participants do not devote much time to writing, this can be a problem when they have deadlines to meet. One of the respondents stated that:

Deadlines can be a source of anxiety. I mean not being able to meet the deadlines makes me anxious since I haven't really progressed in my thesis and haven't any publication. Time

flies so rapidly and the due date to submit my thesis is looming and I find myself freaking out.

This finding is in line with the results reached by Ho (2016) who found that a quarter of the participants suffered from writing anxiety due to time constraints. Indeed, one of the participants admitted that "... A feeling of not being able to get my writing done before the due day always haunted me in the process of writing. I got panic as the deadline approached" (Ho, 2016, p. 33). This finding also reinforces the results obtained from questionnaire items 7 and 13 since 72.2% of the participants were worried about their inability to finish the thesis before the submission deadline date and the same percentage got panicky when they had to write a research paper under time constraints. Thus, in order to handle deadline anxiety, students should set a writing timetable and a time limit for each part of the research paper.

4.4. Writing Anxiety Coping Strategies

The second open-ended question of the questionnaire asked the respondents to report the coping strategies to overcome their writing anxiety. The thematic analysis of the collected data revealed three main strategies. The first strategy mentioned by the respondents was taking breaks from writing. One of the students said that she manages her writing anxiety "by creating a more enjoyable atmosphere by taking breaks, a lot of breaks. By taking pauses from writing, I usually feel energized and ready to write again". Another student claimed that:

Actually, when I get overwhelmed and very anxious about my writing, I always take a break and have some days off by doing things I like such as working out, watching a movie, listening to music, going for a walk, etc., which is very helpful to relieve the tension and focus on writing again.

Taking short breaks and breaking the routine can help doctoral students to recharge their batteries, loosen the pressure, alleviate anxiety, and get back to writing. However, having too much downtime can be counter-productive and can result in the development of avoidance habits, procrastination, and higher levels of writing anxiety. Therefore, it is important for doctoral students to manage their time in a way that they can take some time off without making this a habit. They can take breaks only when they feel physically and emotionally overwhelmed.

The second anxiety-relieving strategy reported by the respondents was self-encouragement. For instance, one of the students stated that "I try to encourage myself and say that since I have succeeded in my Ph.D. exam, it means that I am competent enough to finish my research and graduate". Another student declared that:

I just do my best and always put into account that I will do it and be successful. I always tell myself that with perseverance and hard work, I can achieve anything. The doctorate is a hard, complicated and stressful project but I will succeed anyway.

Positive self-talk or self-encouragement is important because it can help doctoral students to increase their motivation to write, reduce their writing anxiety, and persist to reach their goals

even when they face overwhelming situations. Therefore, in order to reduce writing anxiety, doctoral students should ban any negative thoughts.

The third strategy cited by the respondents was seeking help, advice, and feedback. The participants indicated that whenever they feel anxious and uncertain, they elicit feedback from colleagues and other doctoral candidates. One of the students asserted that “When I feel nervous and unsure about how to write any section in my thesis and my supervisor is not available, I usually ask my classmates or colleagues who have already graduated to give me their input and advice”. Another student admitted that “When my supervisor is busy, I tend to ask colleagues who are specialized in my field for advice. This helps me to get familiar with the different steps that are required to write a thesis and publish an article”. Aside from the thesis supervisor, doctoral students should seek help, advice, and encouragement from others when facing writing anxiety.

5. CONCLUSION

The present study explored writing anxiety among eighteen EFL doctoral students enrolled at the university of Tizi-Ouzou. To be more specific, this research examined the levels of doctoral students’ writing anxiety, determined the causes of their apprehension, and uncovered the different anxiety-coping strategies they use. The findings showed that more than half of the respondents experienced high amounts of writing anxiety. The results also revealed that the respondents’ writing anxiety stemmed from a variety of sources and in order to cope with their apprehension they apply some anxiety-relieving strategies.

The present study was just an attempt to understand the writing anxiety phenomenon among EFL doctoral students. Therefore, the results should be interpreted cautiously. First of all, the number of respondents was relatively small. Thus, in order to generalize the findings, further research is needed with a larger sample involving EFL doctoral students enrolled in other Algerian universities. A further limitation lies in the number of male participants. It would have been helpful to compare the levels of writing anxiety experienced by male and female doctoral students. In addition, this research used only one instrument to collect data. As for catching further evidence, studies using other data collection tools can shed more light on the existence of writing anxiety among doctoral students. Furthermore, this study explored writing anxiety as one of the problems faced by doctoral students. Future studies ought to investigate other challenges students encounter during their journey to earn a doctorate degree.

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