

# The Causes of Writing Apprehension through Students' Perspective

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**Abstract**—Although studies on the causes of writing apprehension on native learners of English have been done extensively, studies on English as foreign language (EFL) learners are scant. In fact, limited studies have examined writing apprehension experienced by EFL postgraduate learners, in particular written academic discourse. Therefore, the study focused on writing apprehension experienced by Jordanian EFL learners when writing their PhD thesis in Malaysia. The objective of the study was to explore the causes of writing apprehension among Jordanian PhD students at Universiti Utara Malaysia. In this qualitative case study, the researchers interviewed 21 Jordanian PhD students. Four main themes emerged pertaining to causes of writing apprehension which are Lack of knowledge in English structure, Negative attitude toward writing, Negative writing experience in the past, and Inadequate knowledge in academic writing. The study concluded that writing apprehension was a prevalent phenomenon among the students. The study contributes to the body of knowledge on writing apprehension related to the causes of writing apprehension. It highlights internal and external factors which contribute to writing apprehension.

**Index Terms**—writing apprehension, Jordanian PhD student, EFL learners

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Writing Apprehension

Writing apprehension is a term that has been introduced by Daly and Miller (1975). They defined writing apprehension as "A subjective complex of attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral interaction which reinforces each other" (Daly & Miller, 1975, p. 11). Researchers have used many terms to refer to writing apprehension such as anxiety and blocking (Al-Ahmad, 2003; Gungl & Taylor, 1989; Rose, 1980, 1983). They consider writing apprehension as a complex term because of the complexity of writing. Writing apprehension is a serious problem that can hinder the performance of both native and non-native learners (Al-Sobh & Al-Abed Al-Haq, 2012; Graves, 1984).

Writing apprehension is associated with many kinds of experiences. First, it refers to a behavior of resistance by an individual writer in a situation when he/she cannot begin to write or is being interrupted in the writing process owing largely to writing avoidance. Second, it is used to describe a writer who negatively judges a particular writing project's value or any writing project's value; in other words, the avoidance stems from the writer's negative attitude. It is also used to refer to a general anxiety and agitation during the writing process in cases whereby the writer is blocked or otherwise (Hettich, 1994). In addition, writers generally experience one or more elements of writing apprehension including negative attitudes, emotional agitation or blocking. In some cases, the writer manages to finish the project but in others he/she fails to. Writers suffer from writing apprehension owing to feelings of anxiety or negative attitudes towards writing but there is no clear cut solution for their problem (Hettich, 1994).

Researchers have found three levels of writing apprehension, ranging from high, moderate, and low level (Daly & Miller, 1975). A study done by Hanna (2010) discovered that writing apprehension may influence students at all levels even after they have graduated from universities. Her research on apprehensive graduate students at Midwestern University found that they experienced a high level of writing apprehension and produced a paper which was of less quality than the low apprehensive writers. She also found that students with high level of writing apprehension like to avoid writing tasks whenever possible and procrastinate their work. Daly and Miller (1975) believe that writing apprehension is associated with the tendency of people to approach or avoid writing. In other words, highly apprehensive students avoid writing whenever possible.

Three studies (Abu Shawish & Atea, 2010; Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012; Salem, 2007) on writing apprehension among Arab EFL students showed that they experienced high level of writing apprehension. The sampling of two (Abu Shawish & Atea, 2010; Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012) studies consisted of both gender, but Salem's study involved only male students. All the participants in these studies were undergraduate students majoring in English language. However, the present study consisted of postgraduate students majoring in various majors including English major. The present study is similar to Salem's (2007) study with regards to the sampling of the study, as this study is concerned with male students while the other studies focused on both two genders. A study was done by Al-Sawalha and Chow (2012) on

Jordanian students at Yarmouk University who were at the third year of English language and literature major. The results of this study showed that majority of the Jordanian EFL students at Yarmouk University experienced a high level of writing apprehension.

A study done by Salem (2007) explored the views of 50 male undergraduate students majoring in English concerning writing in English at the University of Al-Azhar. Most of the students felt overwhelmed when they were required to write on a certain topic. They did not know how to start, how to develop their ideas or how to conclude the essay. They also lacked the technical skills of writing acceptable for compositions in English. They often repeated their ideas, reported few if any valid points, made serious mistakes in grammar and punctuation, and included irrelevant information.

The sampling for the present study is the same as the previous study done by Huwari and Noor Hashima (2011) i.e. on Jordanian postgraduate students. Both studies focused on the same context i.e. UUM. Huwari and Noor Hashima (2011) investigated writing apprehension among one hundred and three Jordanian postgraduate students in Universiti Utara Malaysia. The instrument used in this study was Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) developed by Daly and Miller (1975) to measure writing apprehension. The results of this study showed that majority of the Jordanian postgraduate students experienced high level of writing apprehension. There was a significant relationship between age, socio-economic status and writing apprehension. The researchers also included open-ended question in the survey. Majority of the respondents said that they experienced apprehension in writing a thesis more than writing assignments, or writing journals. It is important for the supervisors of the Jordanian postgraduate students in UUM specifically to be aware of their students' problems in writing in English.

In summary, researchers consider writing apprehension to be a complex term and a critical problem which may be faced by both native and non-native English learners. It will eventually impact the student's learning process. Researchers have also considered writing apprehension as synonymous with writing anxiety or blocks while others have categorized it into two main levels called high apprehensive writers and low apprehensive writers. For those reason the researchers have decided to study the causes of writing apprehension among Jordanian PhD students those who study abroad.

#### *B. Studies on the Causes of Writing Apprehension*

ESL and EFL learners often face challenges while writing in English language because of writing apprehension. Lin and Ho (2009) also conducted a study exploring the causes of writing apprehension at a college located in Southern Taiwan. The researchers collected data through interviewing sixteen undergraduate students after taking a writing course. The outcome of the study was categorized into five different challenges that the students felt they were up against. These challenges were: (1) Issues of time restriction such as thinking of the limitation of a time during testing or classes, (2) Issues of teacher's evaluation such as students are looking for teacher's evaluation and negative comments in their work, (3) Issue of peer competition such as peer's comment and attitudes of competition, (4) Issues of writing subjects, (5) Issue of required writing format. Thus, this study is important as it explored the causes that ESL/EFL experience when writing in English.

A similar study was conducted by Daud, Daud and Kassim (2005) involving 186 third year university students at MARA, Malaysia. The target subjects admitted to suffering from anxiety stemming from their lack of writing skills attributable to lack of vocabulary knowledge and experience of language use. It was concluded that writing teachers needed to modify their teaching of writing from a lecture-based model which was found to be ineffective. It is recommended that teachers encourage students in using the target language in an authentic way. The study concluded that low performing students had higher apprehensiveness in writing compared to high performing students. Thus, this study is important as it explained the causes among Asian students in regarding to the writing apprehension.

More recently, A study was done by Kara (2013) on 150 first year students studying at Anadolu University in Turkey found the students having writing anxiety. They had problem in writing because they were not used to write but were familiar in taking tests. Thus, this study is important as it explored the causes of writing apprehension on the countries in the Middle East. As we noticed that the previous studies have investigated writing apprehension on undergraduate students. This study has discovered writing apprehension among postgraduate students.

On the other hand, Tighe (1987) mentions only two main causes of students' writing apprehension and these are: (1) Critical comments, (2) Fear of evaluation. Similarly, in investigating writing apprehension among Egyptian EFL university students, Latif (2007) reveals the following causes of writing apprehension: (1) Lack of linguistic knowledge like grammar and vocabulary knowledge, (2) Low foreign language competence, (3) Poor history of writing achievement and perceived writing performance improvement, (4) Low English writing self-efficacy, (5) Instructional practice of English writing and (6) Fear of Criticism. Even though these two studies are done on EFL context especially from Arab context but still there are differences in relation to the causes that might discovered from Jordanian PhD students and the relationship between supervisors and their students which might affect them in writing.

Al-Khasawneh (2010) explored the writing problems and their causes in Arab students' writing courses at the College of Business programs (COB) in Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). The study involved 10 Arab postgraduate students and data was obtained through face to face interview. The results revealed that the students felt challenged by their lack of vocabulary, organization of ideas, grammar, spelling, and referencing. The study concluded by providing the causes of writing problems: (1) Weak foundation such as the status of English, the students' motivation to learn

English, and the teachers' lack of interest, (2) Environment reasons such as the use of the mother tongue, few opportunities to practice English, and isolated culture, (3) Methods of teaching English in their countries such as using Arabic in English classes, (4) Writing done in Arabic, (5) Teachers' low proficiency in English, (6) Lack of writing practice in educational institutions. Al-Khasawneh's (2010) study is important because it is the only study that focused on the difficulties that Arab postgraduate students experience in writing in UUM. This study, however, has some limitations. For example, Al-Khasawneh's (2010) study has used only one method for the study of perception. Hence, perception can be examined using document analysis. Regarding the participants, those who served as native speakers of Arabic came from two region of Arab (the Middle East) and they may not be representative. Thus, Al-Khasawneh's (2010) study has interviewed Arab postgraduate students in College of Business only. The present study, the researchers have interviewed Jordanian PhD students in different colleges in UUM.

Moreover, very few studies have discovered writing apprehension on Arab students (Latif, 2007). It can be seen that the previous studies have been done on undergraduate students except for in Al-Khasawneh (2010) study's on postgraduate students. The researchers of this study have taken this issue into consideration to study writing apprehension on postgraduate students to fill in this gap. The findings of the previous studies reviewed above are mostly consistent. The researchers have noticed that few research have identified the causes of writing apprehension when writing PhD thesis. It also can be seen from the literature that writing apprehension has not been studied adequately in Arabic culture.

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Writing is a serious problem for first and second language learners (Al Ahmad, 2003). It is more complex in second language contexts where learners write in language systems that may be completely different from their first language system. There are limited number of studies on writing apprehension among ESL/EFL learners. Some researchers state that most of the research on writing apprehension focused on native English learners (Al-Ahmad, 2003; Atay & Kurt, 2007; Cheng, 2004; Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999; Cornwell & McKay, 1999; Daud, Daud & Kassim, 2005; Gungle & Taylor, 1989; Hassan, 2001; Jones, 1985; Masny & Foxall, 1992; Rankin-Brown, 2006; Salem, 2007). Only few research have focused on writing apprehension among second and foreign language (ESL/EFL) learners (Al-Ahmad 2003; Atay & Kurt, 2007; Hassan, 2001; Latif, 2007; Salem, 2007; Singh & Rajalingam, 2003). According to Cheng et al. (1999), one possible reason for this neglect to investigate writing apprehension in ESL/EFL contexts could be due to the second or foreign language instruction that is oral proficiency in the target language is a more important skill to master than writing skill. However, most studies on writing apprehension in Second Language (L2) contexts have reported mixed and confusing results pertaining to writing apprehension (Cheng et al., 1999). In this regard, Hassan (2001, p.12) remarked that "there is a need to investigate writing apprehension in an Arabic speaking context".

The number of Jordanian PhD students studying in Universiti Utara Malaysia is increasing. The number of Jordanian PhD students who graduated from UUM in 2011 was 44 students. In 2011, there are 77 Jordanian PhD students in UUM were still studying in the first semester 2010/2011 (Graduate Studies Unit in UUM, 2011). From the researchers observation, these students faced great problem when writing their PhD thesis in English because of their educational background and less practice of writing in English. From the researchers knowledge, students in Jordan lack the ability to write in English at school and university level because they did very little writing in English. Moreover, writing apprehension has been found to be a major problem facing Jordanian students at different stages of learning whether at school, university or postgraduate level (Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012; Al-Sobh & Al-Abed Al-Haq, 2012; Huwari & Noor Hashima, 2011; Muhaisen & Al-Abed Al-Haq, 2012). Research done on Jordanian students found that they faced high level of writing apprehension at different stages of learning whether at school, university, or postgraduate level. Therefore, there is a need to study on causes of writing apprehension (WA) on Jordanian students (Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012; Al-Sobh & Al-Abed Al-Haq, 2012; Muhaisen & Al-Abed Al-Haq, 2012). Although studies have been done on Jordanian students, these studies were done in Jordan. Therefore, there is a need to conduct a study on Jordanian students who are studying abroad and this study tries to fill in this gap. Moreover, very few studies have been done on Arab postgraduate students overseas compared with local students. This has made the researchers interested to highlight writing apprehension among Jordanian PhD students who are studying in UUM.

## III. RESEARCH QUESTION

This study would be done with the following objective: *What are the causes of writing apprehension among the Jordanian PhD students when writing their PhD thesis in Universiti Utara Malaysia?*

## IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because it is one of the very few studies to be conducted on Jordanian students who are studying overseas and doing postgraduate studies. Most of the literature written on writing apprehension come from the English speaking countries. Therefore, this study can contribute to the existing research on writing apprehension among postgraduate students especially Jordanians. This study can add to the literature on EFL context to help researchers understand writing apprehension phenomenon among EFL learners like Jordanian context. Exploring the causes of

writing apprehension among Jordanian PhD students would enhance our understanding of the writing apprehension among Arab students. It is also hoped that this study will help learners to become aware of the causes of writing apprehension. By exploring the causes of writing apprehension among Jordanian PhD students in UUM, supervisors can help their supervisees to reduce writing apprehension. In addition, the present research will contribute to the literature and growing research on writing apprehension from students' perspective.

## V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### A. Research Design

to explore the students' beliefs and thoughts about writing apprehension. This study employs qualitative case study research design. The researchers used semi-structured interviews. A qualitative case study is defined by Merriam as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (1998, p.27). In this study, an intensive and holistic description of WA phenomenon from Jordanian PhD students' perspectives was given.

### B. Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 21 male Jordanian PhD students in UUM. There was no female PhD students studying in UUM before the first semester, 2011-2012 when the researchers started to conduct this study. The participants were PhD students at one of the three colleges in UUM: College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), College of Business (COB) and College of Law, Governance and International Studies (COLGIS). The type of sampling used for this study was purposive sampling in order to select information rich cases which refers to "those cases from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (Patton, 1999, p. 169). In this study, the Jordanian PhD students in UUM were interviewed to get their perspectives on writing apprehension. The sampling strategy employed for this study was homogeneous sampling which means that "the researcher purposefully samples individuals or sites based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics" (Creswell, 2012, p. 208).

### C. Data Collection

The researchers used semi-structured interview to collect the data. The researchers stopped interviewing the participants at the 21 participant although data saturation had been reached at the nineteenth participant. This was done to make sure that the data had reached the point of saturation and that no more new information could be obtained from the participants. In this study, the length of interviews varies from twenty minutes to forty minutes (Creswell, 2012). The difference in the lengths of the interviews was due to the differences in the students' speech flow and the number of events they had experienced. The researchers interviewed Jordanian PhD students in a room in the library to make sure that the environment was suitable for recording data. All the interviews were conducted one time with each interviewer. In the beginning of the interview, the researchers did some introductory explanation about the research, a word of thanks to the interviewee for agreeing to be interviewed, and then the researchers obtained permission to tape-record the interview. All the students' interviews were tape-recorded. The researchers checked the recorder before conducting the interview to make sure it worked. The interviewer managed to make the participants open and relaxed about tape recording. The researchers showed that the answers given were interesting, straightforward, and helpful by using eye contact, nods, and other reinforcements. All the semi-structured interviews were asked in English language because all of the students and supervisors were able to understand the language well. Besides, this step was adopted to avoid any misrepresentation while translating the interview responses. However, none of the participants asked the researchers to translate the interview questions. The participants were allowed to choose the language they preferred to answer the interview questions. At the end of each session, the researchers thanked the participants for their time.

## VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research question of this study was: What are the causes of writing apprehension among the Jordanian PhD students when writing their PhD thesis in Universiti Utara Malaysia? It was found that the students associated apprehension in writing their PhD thesis with the lack of knowledge in English structure, negative attitude toward writing, negative writing experience in the past, and inadequate knowledge in academic writing.

### A. Theme 1: Lack of Knowledge in English Structure

The first theme which emerged from this study was lack of knowledge in English structure, which is divided into three sub-themes: problems with coherence, problems in mechanism of writing and limited vocabulary. Majority of the participants (20 out of 21 participants) in this study associated writing apprehension with the lack of knowledge in English structure.

TABLE 1.  
CAUSES OF WRITING APPREHENSION (THEME 1)

| Theme 1                                | Sub-theme  | Occurrences |
|--|--|-------------|
| Lack of knowledge in English structure | Problems with coherence (Writing flow, conjunction words, unrelated sentences, repetition, and sentence length).       | 20          |
|  | Problems in mechanism of writing (Grammar, reporting verbs, punctuation, spelling, paraphrasing, and capital letters). | 18          |
|  | Limited vocabulary   | 14          |

Most of the Jordanian PhD students interviewed claimed that they faced problem with the writing flow such as how to connect between sentences and paragraphs, and organization of ideas. For example, participant 11 who is majoring in Applied Linguistics programme expressed his problem of linking the paragraphs. He said:

It was a big challenge for me to link the paragraphs, for example, when I finish one paragraph I do not know how to make a connection with the next one. How should I start the next paragraph (Participant, 11).

Participant 7, majoring in Information Technology programme talked about the same problem that he was facing which is making the sentences linking with each other. He said:

I have faced problem with linking between sentences and the paragraphs because I rarely write in English before I come to Malaysia (Participant, 7).

Participant 2, for example, was sure that he had made grammatical mistakes in his proposal but he could not find them easily by himself. He said:

I have faced a lot of grammatical mistakes such as using simple present or simple continuous in some cases, maybe because I am not native speaker of English language (Participant, 2).

Participant 8 had less confidence in using grammar in writing. He believed that he was weak in grammar since he was a child. He could not produce a good paper. He remarked:

I know myself; I am very weak in grammar since I was in the school. My supervisor always complains because of my silly grammar mistakes such as subject verb agreement (Participant, 8).

In addition, some participants could not differentiate between some similar words such as required and need. Participant 14 remarked:

Another challenge is the correct usage of words. Sometimes, I misuse the words need or required. Sometimes I use the one in the place of another one which give very weak sentences. Writing PhD thesis in English is much difficult than writing other tasks because it is related to specific area and specific domain and specific discipline of knowledge it will be governed by a set of idioms and keywords which is related to this discipline while the writing other tasks, maybe it will not be governed or control by specific keywords or idioms. This is my weak part also (Participant, 14).

Moreover, participant 16 admitted not having enough vocabulary to improve his writing. He said:

For me, I feel struggle to write in English as I don't have enough vocabulary to use. At the same time, I used many vocabularies in the wrong place or situation (Participant, 16).

In the present study, majority of the PhD Jordanian students mentioned problems in coherence as the major cause of writing apprehension when writing their PhD thesis. The problems with coherence were related to writing flow, conjunction words, unrelated sentences, repetition, and sentence length. These findings are similar to the findings by (Al Fadda, 2012; Daud et al., 2005; Daly, 1978a; Khan, 2011; Latif 2007; Mo, 2012; Salem, 2007).

#### B. Theme 2: Negative Attitude toward Writing

The second theme which emerged from this study was negative attitude toward writing. This theme means that students are afraid of writing because of various reasons such as no motivation to write in English, and fear of evaluation. In this study, almost all of the participants (17 out of 21) admitted of having negative attitude toward writing. Table 2 displays the main theme, the sub-themes and occurrence i.e. how many times the participants mention the sub-theme. The main theme is divided into two sub-themes which are lack of motivation to write in English, and fear of evaluation.

TABLE 2.  
CAUSES OF WRITING APPREHENSION (THEME 2)

| Theme                            | Sub-themes                              | Occurrence |
|----------------------------------|---|------------|
| Negative attitude toward writing | Lack of motivation to write in English. | 16         |
|                                  | Fear of evaluation.                     | 10         |

As shown in Table 2, majority of the students (16 out of 21) mentioned that they lack the motivation to write in English. This sub-theme is an unexpected sub-theme for the researchers because the participants of this study are PhD students and they are required to write in English. Some of the participants preferred to write in Arabic language which is their mother tongue because they believed they could express their ideas and thoughts faster and easier than writing in English. Participant 2 said:

Writing in Arabic language is better and easier for me rather than writing In English because while writing in Arabic language, I can express my ideas about the topic that I am writing on. This is because that Arabic language is more rich language. You can find one vocabulary has different alternative vocabularies that you can use them (Participant, 2).

Some of the participants associated apprehension with lack of motivation to write in English because they considered themselves to be new users of English language. They rarely wrote in English before coming to Malaysia. They were still hesitant to write in English. Participant 7 expressed this idea by saying:

I always like to write in Arabic language because Arabic is my original language from my school until 1999, I was writing in Arabic but when I came to Malaysia, the environment force me to speak or write English. Can we say English is still new language for me. I still did not get good skills of English language such as writing. The Arabic is better for me because it is original language for me (Participant, 7).

Participant 19 believed that evaluation by panelists would increase his apprehension when writing in English. He said:

Everything in your PhD thesis will be judge by the panels. So, you have to write something new and perfect (Participant, 19).

Participant 12 highlighted an important issue by claiming that the level of apprehension in writing would increase when he had to write in formal situations such as writing PhD thesis. He said:

My apprehension for the formal situations will be high because others will evaluate your works (Participant, 12).

The second main theme which emerged from this study was Negative attitude toward writing which was divided into Lack of motivation and fear of evaluation. These findings are the same as those found by other researchers such as (Clark, 2005; Latif, 2007; Mo, 2012; Reeves, 1997; Tighe, 1987). The researchers found Lack of motivation and fear of evaluation are the most frequently cited cause of writing apprehension by the participants in their studies. In the present study, some of the participants said that they were afraid of being evaluated because they were very concerned about the kind of feedback that they would get from their supervisors and the examiners.

### C. Theme 3: Negative Writing Experience in the Past

The third theme which emerged from this study was Negative writing experiences in the past. It means that participants went through a bad writing experience in the past which increased the level of apprehension. Majority of the participants (19 out of 21) admitted feeling apprehensive because of negative writing experience in the past. This theme is divided into two sub-themes which are less practice in writing, and thinking in Arabic, and then translating into English. Table 3 displays the main theme of this study which is negative writing experience in the past. Occurrence refers to how many times the participants mentioned it.

TABLE 3  
CAUSES OF WRITING APPREHENSION (THEME 3)

| Theme                                   | Sub-themes   | Occurrence |
|---|--|------------|
| Negative Writing Experience in the Past | Less practice in writing                               | 13         |
|   | Thinking in Arabic, and then translating into English. | 8          |

As shown in Table 3, the third theme of this study was negative writing experiences in the past which is divided into two sub-themes; less practice in writing, and thinking in Arabic, and then translating into English. The first sub-theme of this study is concerned with less practice in writing. About half of the participants (13 out of 21) admitted that they were facing problem in writing PhD thesis because they did not write in English much. They associated this problem to the past learning process starting from school, bachelor and then master levels. Some of the participants said that they started writing in English when they came to further their studies in Malaysia and some of them said that they had never written in English for academic purpose. Participant 4 said that he had never written in English before he came to Malaysia because he obtained his first and second degrees from Ukraine which used Russian as the medium of instruction. He said:

I rarely wrote in English before I start writing my proposal because I graduated from Ukraine while the medium of instruction is Russian language. Actually, I start concern about writing in English since I register for PhD in UUM. Since that time, writing in English was a new thing for me because I left my country to study in Ukraine when I was 18 years old. So, I did not use English at all in Ukraine because the medium of instruction there is in Russian language. For example, my project for master degree I wrote in Russian language. The most difficult things while writing my project was I have to write the abstract in English language. So, I used Google translation to translate it to English. But when I have a look to that page now; I found it almost wrong. It is missing to the organization and has grammatical mistakes (Participant, 4).

Participant 15 explained the reasons behind his weaknesses in writing which was regarding his educational background and the major that he studied which was focusing on numbers rather than writing itself. He remarked:

I started writing in English just 3 years ago before that I never write in English. During the school, I write at the final stage. We try to write in English. For bachelor degree, I just study in science language which is not totally depending on writing. It depends on mathematics (Participant, 15).

However, participant 20 commented on an important issue which was the differences between studying in English and writing in English. He said:

I studied in English language for my bachelor and master degrees but studying in English is different than writing in English. If you just write to answer the question is different from write something such as thesis or story, letters. It is quite different between studying and writing (Participant, 20).

Participant 2 associated thinking and writing in Arabic as the cause of this problem. It is acceptable to write long paragraphs in Arabic but in English the paragraphs are usually short and precise. Participant 2 said:

The way that I write was too long sentences, too long paragraphs but when I was reading other articles, they can express their ideas with a short sentence and paragraphs. This is because the difference between writing in English and writing in Arabic. It is accepted to write a long sentence in Arabic language (Participant, 2)

Participant 16 stated that he was using this strategy whereby his apprehension of writing increased day by day. He said:

I always thinking how to write in Arabic, then translate it to English which I think is the wrong way. So, this problem is really increased my apprehension of writing because once you translate from Arabic to English, you will get a lot of mistakes, misunderstanding the ideas (Participant, 16).

An interesting finding found in this study was the response given by the participants whereby they think in Arabic and then translate it into English. One of the reasons giving by the participants was because they found it easy to express their ideas in mother tongue, Arabic compared to English. Another reason mentioned by the participants was because they found it easy to write long paragraphs in Arabic compared to writing short paragraphs in order to be precise in English. The main theme Negative Writing Experience in the Past is similar to the findings by Al-Khasawneh (2010) who found it as the most frequently mentioned cause of writing apprehension by the Arab postgraduate students in UUM.

#### *D. Theme 4: Inadequate Knowledge in Academic Writing*

The fourth theme which emerged from this study was inadequate knowledge in academic writing. Some of the Jordanian PhD students were found struggling with academic writing for several reasons. Half of the participants (12 out of 21) declared that they were weak in research methods. This theme is divided into two sub-themes which are weak in writing the PhD proposal such as writing introduction (Chapter One), writing literature review (Chapter Two) and writing the methodology (Chapter Three). The second sub-theme was problems with writing styles. Table 4.4 displays the main theme, and two sub-themes, as well as the occurrence of these themes.

TABLE 4  
CAUSES OF WRITING APPREHENSION (THEME 4)

| Theme                                    | Sub-theme  | Occurrence |
|--|--|------------|
| Inadequate Knowledge in Academic Writing | Weak in writing the PhD proposal such as writing introduction (Chapter One), writing literature review (Chapter Two) and writing the methodology (Chapter Three) | 12         |
|  | Problems with writing style  | 6          |

Participants in this study admitted having problem in writing their proposal especially during the first semester because they wrote their master thesis in Arabic language or they did follow UUM standard of writing the thesis. Participant 2 commented that he did not know how to write his PhD proposal because his mother tongue is Arabic language and he wrote his master thesis in Arabic. He said:

I faced a problem of how to write a PhD thesis at the beginning because I have did my bachelor and master degrees in Arabic language (Participant, 2).

Likewise, participant 7 said that he was not familiar how to write a research proposal during the first semester following UUM standard. He said:

I do not know how I should start with the PhD proposal because I do not follow UUM standard of writing thesis because it is not clear to follow first, then because I think there is no different between UUM and my old university. For example, UUM standard is complicated for me at the beginning such as I have to complete write my three chapter in one year (Participant, 7).

The second sub-theme which emerged from this study was problems with writing style that is writing the references, citation and following the APA style 6<sup>th</sup> edition. 6 out of 21 participants admitted that they were having problem in this issue which increased their level of apprehension. For example, participant 2 stated that he had problem with writing the references because he graduated from Jordan where he wrote the references in Arabic which is different from English. It took him some time before he could understand how to write the references. He said:

I faced problem with APA style because the way you make a citation in English is different from Arabic language (Participant, 2).

Similarly, other participants shared the same problem of doing the citation correctly and writing the references at the end. The researchers observed that those students who were having this problem graduated from Jordan while those students who graduated from Malaysia did not face the same problem. For example, participant 3 expressed his problem of following APA style by saying:

I have faced problem with APA style to make the references on how to write the citation. For examples, when you write “et al” for several authors (Participant, 3).

This theme Inadequate Knowledge in Academic Writing was similar to the findings by (Al Fadda, 2012; Daud et al., 2005; Salem, 2007). The researchers found Arab students weak in writing thesis because of the educational system in Arab countries which is different from other countries. To conclude, this study discovered the same causes of writing apprehension among Arab students in research done by Al-Khasawneh (2010) and Latif (2007). Moreover, Jordanian culture is similar to the Arab culture because they share the same language, attitude, behavior, and religion.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### A. Summary of the Findings

This study employed qualitative case study while the participants were 21 Jordanian PhD students at UUM. The sampling of this study was purposive sampling while the researchers selected homogeneous sampling strategy. The researched collected the data through face to face interview with the participants. The findings of this study revealed the causes of writing apprehension among Jordanian PhD students. It was found that the Jordanian PhD students in UUM faced several causes of writing apprehension when writing their PhD thesis such as: Lack of knowledge in English structure, negative attitude toward writing, negative writing experience in the past, and inadequate knowledge in academic writing.

### B. Implications of this Study

This study has provided the researchers with a better understanding of writing apprehension among the Jordanian PhD students in UUM. The implications of this study are divided into two main parts which are implications for learners and implications for supervisors.

#### 1. Learners

First of all, students should realize that apprehension in writing is different from one student to another. The researchers observed that students who obtained a master degree from Malaysia were less apprehensive than those who obtained their master degree from another country such as Jordan and Iraq. So, this study hopes that the students will believe on their ability to produce a very good paper. Second, students should believe that making mistakes while writing the PhD thesis is part of the learning process because some students almost gave up when they were facing some difficulties to write their PhD thesis such as finding the gap of the research. Third, by discovering the causes of writing apprehension among the Jordanian PhD students in UUM will help learners to become aware of the causes of writing apprehension.

#### 2. Supervisors

Supervisors play an important role to decrease the apprehension of writing among PhD students. One student mentioned that he preferred to do his work in a group. Supervisor can make their supervisees work in a group because it can be a good way to decrease their level of apprehension because students can share their knowledge, and experience. At the same time, they can correct themselves. One important implication is that supervisors should be aware of the causes of students writing apprehension. This study provides some causes that Jordanian PhD students have while writing their PhD thesis. Supervisors should be aware of this case.

### C. Limitations of the Study

The researchers interviewed male Jordanian PhD students in UUM only because at present there are no female Jordanian PhD students in UUM.

### D. Recommendations for Future Research

There are many opportunities for further research concerning writing apprehension and postgraduate students. Based on the findings of this study, these are some recommendations for further research. First of all, this study is done among Jordanian PhD students who are studying abroad a very limited number of studies have been done on Jordanian students. The researchers recommend that more studies should be done on Jordanian postgraduate students to compare the results of the causes of writing apprehension. In addition, the researchers recommend identifying the strategies that students use based on their level of apprehension in writing. Another recommendation is to conduct a similar study across different institutions and/or across other disciplines. It is important to mention that the number of case studies was very small and bound to one institution. The sample was also very much gender-oriented as most of the interviewees were men.

### E. Conclusion

The study concurs with the relevant studies such as (Al Fadda, 2012; Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Daud et al., 2005; Daly, 1978a; Khan, 2011; Latif 2007; Mo, 2012; Salem, 2007). This paper has presented the objective, process and results of the study in hope of contributing to the research of language acquisition, psycholinguistics. Although there are a lot of studies in this field, more research in different contexts should be implemented to have a broader view because apprehension in writing is important to students in reducing students' level of apprehension.



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