Exploring the relationship between writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy of international students learning Turkish as a second language

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Abstract

The purpose of this correlational study was to explore the relationship between writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy levels of international students learning Turkish as a second language. Data were collected from a convenience sample of 204 international students through "Writing Anxiety Scale for Learners of Turkish as a Foreign Language Scale", "Writing Self-Efficacy Scale for Students Learning Turkish as a Foreign Language" and a personal information form. In the analyses of the data, descriptive statistics, Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis-H test, Spearman's Rank-Difference Coefficients of Correlation were used. In this study, international students were found to have medium levels of writing anxiety and high levels of writing self-efficacy. Analyses indicated that male students had higher levels of action-oriented writing anxiety than female students. It was also found that doctoral students had higher levels of action-oriented writing anxiety than undergraduate students. Lastly, it was determined that there was a low and positive correlation between international students' writing self-efficacy and action-oriented writing anxiety.

Keywords: writing, anxiety, self-efficacy, Turkish as a second language

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1. Introduction

Writing skill is a multidimensional skill known as one of the hardest skills to acquire and learn compared to other language skills (Allen & Corder, 1974; Cook, 2013; Mah & Khor, 2015). Therefore, writing often turns into a difficult process for both second (SL) or foreign language (FL) learners and first language (L1) learners (Belet & Yaşar, 2007; Idris, 2009; Mah et al., 2017). This also applies to for international students who come to Turkey from different countries and learn Turkish as a second language (TSL) (Tiryaki, 2013; Altunkaya & Ateş, 2017). Writing skill has a complex structure consisting of cognitive, affective and psychomotor dimensions. However, since more cognitive processing is needed in writing skill compared to other language skills, attention is generally drawn to the cognitive aspect of writing (Karakaya & Ulper, 2011; Şen & Boylu, 2017). On the other hand, the affective dimension of writing, which directly or indirectly affects both the cognitive and psychomotor dimensions of writing, is also of particular importance (Zabihi, 2018). The affective dimension of writing, which consists of various factors such as motivation, self-efficacy perception and disposition, can affect the writing process in different ways (McLeod, 1987; Cheng, 2002; Şen & Boylu, 2017).

Of many affective factors, anxiety can cause difficulties in language learning (Balta, 2018; Blasco, 2016; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Stewart, Seifert & Rolheiser, 2015) by occupying working memory capacity and affecting cognitive processing negatively (Terry, 2017). Since writing is a complex cognitive activity, learning to write in a SL might cause as much anxiety as the other language skills (Tsui, 1996). Daly and Miller (1975) introduced the concept of writing anxiety (WA) in order to express the anxiety that individuals encounter while writing and developed a scale to measure WA. Their study had an important role in showing the extent of the effect of WA (Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999) and led an increasing number of studies to be carried out on WA. The "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale" study by Horwitz et al. (1986) was the reason why anxiety studies gained momentum in the field of FLs. Through this study, attention was drawn to anxiety in FL classes and it turned into a field of study. According to Cheng et al. (1999) who studied the relationship between WA and FL class anxiety, FL class anxiety expresses a more general anxiety, while WA expresses an anxiety limited to language skills.

1.1. Literature review

Writing anxiety (WA) is basically a term used to describe the stress or anxiety that students experience during the writing process (Blasco, 2016). It is a reactive situation towards writing. WA reflects individuals' desire to write (Faigley, Daly & Witte, 1981; Zorbaz, 2011; Maden, Dincel & Maden, 2015), success in writing activities (Aytaç-Demirçivi, 2020; Balta, 2018; Maden et al., 2015; Jalok & Idris, 2020), and writing avoidance (Faigley et al., 1981, Zorbaz, 2011). WA can occur at every stage of the writing process. According to Şen and Boylu (2017, p.1126), WA "can occur before, during and after the act of writing, and is closely related to the learner's past life and learning experiences". In a classroom, anxiety may arise from the student, teacher or teaching style (Jawas, 2019; Young, 1991). For this reason, the sources of WA can also differ (Waer, 2021; Lipsou, 2018). The related studies have indicated some of the sources of anxiety in the writing process are the different dimensions of writing (Karakuş Tayşi, 2018), negative self-perception, negative experiences and inadequate writing skills (Ekmekçi, 2018; Zorbaz, 2011), negative criticism of written products (Zorbaz, 2011; Aytan & Tunçel, 2015), failure in writing classes (Aytan & Tunçel, 2015).

In the literature, there are studies that examine different dimensions of writing skill and reveal various types of WA (Aytan & Tunçel, 2015; Şen & Boylu, 2017). Within the scope of this study, international students' WA was examined and addressed in two dimensions which Şen and Boylu

(2017) revealed in their study. The former is the "action-oriented writing anxiety" (AOWA) which expresses the feelings students feel while writing, the pleasure they get from writing and their motivation for writing (Şen & Boylu, 2017). The latter is the "environment-oriented writing anxiety" (EOWA) which expresses, in the most general sense, the discomfort and anxiety caused by teachers and other learners in the learning environment (Şen & Boylu, 2017).

Another affective factor playing a significant role in language learning is learners' perception of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is one of the main variables that provide motivation in language learning (Woodrow, 2011) and represents an individual's belief in her/his own capacity to accomplish a task (Bandura, 1977). Stating that Bandura's definition is the basis of many different definitions of self-efficacy, Buyukikiz (2012) expresses that self-efficacy perception reflects the beliefs of individuals about what they can do. In other words, the perception of self-efficacy refers to a future situation rather than the past. The results of the research on self-efficacy in the context of SL learning point out that self-efficacy is a significant factor affecting learners' interest, determination, motivation, effort to learn, the goals they choose to follow, the usage of self-regulation strategies while carrying out a task, and their success in learning (Pajares, 1996, 2003; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Sabti, Rashid, Nimehchisalem & Darmi, 2019; Schunk, 2003; Lane, Lane, & Kyprianou, 2004; Raoofi, Tan & Chan, 2012). Writing self-efficacy (WSE), which covers a more limited area, can be defined as an individual's own belief in her/his potential to fulfill writing activities. WSE can shape writing behaviors by affecting writing skill in different ways (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007) and can affect writing performance (Woodrow, 2011). In fact, individuals with high self-efficacy perception stand out in dealing with difficulties, working and achieving high success (Schunk, 2003; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007; Buyukikiz, 2012). Studies have revealed that individuals with high level of self-efficacy tend to make use of writing opportunities, pay more attention to and put more effort on writing, are more insistent on the improvement of their writing skills, and have a better writing performance (Sawyer, Graham & Harris, 1992; Pajares & Johnson, 1996; Bandura, 1997; Mahyuddin et al., 2006; Tan, 2006; Shah, Mahmud, Din, Yusof & Pardi, 2011).

There are a number of studies in the literature examining various aspects of writing skills of international students who come to Turkey from different countries and learn Turkish as a second language (TSL). In the field of teaching TSL, it is notable that studies on learners' WA and WSE in the context of writing skills are quite limited. There are some scale studies carried out to measure the WA of those who learn TSL depending on their language levels (Maden et al., 2015). For instance, there are different WA scales developed for basic level (Aytan & Tunçel, 2015), intermediate level (Karakuş Tayşi, 2018) and intermediate-advanced level (Şen & Boylu, 2017). It is also possible to make various inferences about WA and WSE from different studies. It was revealed that those who learned TSL were anxious while writing (Maden et al., 2015). It was determined that students' native languages cause WA due to having different alphabets and syntaxes (Akbulut, 2016) and their anxiety levels differ according to their nationalities (Maden et al., 2015). However, no significant gender difference was found in both WSE and WA (Buyukikiz, 2011; Maden et al., 2015; Akbulut, 2016; Altunkaya & Ateş, 2017; Erdil, 2017). Similarly, no significant difference was found among language levels in WA and WSE of the learners of TSL (Akbulut, 2016; Erdil, 2017). Significant relationships were found between WA and attitude towards writing (Akbulut, 2016), and between perceptions of WSE and writing skills (Buyukikiz, 2011). It was determined that there was a high level of relationship between creative writing skills of learners of TSL and their self-efficacy perceptions (Melanlioğlu & Demir Atalay, 2016b) while the use of reflective diary causes changes in the sub-dimensions of WSE (Melanlioğlu & Demir Atalay, 2016a). It was also found that planned writing activities had a positive effect on students' WA, WSE and achievement (Çocuk & Yanpar Yelken, 2021).

1.2. Research questions

This study aims to explore the relationship between WA and WSE levels of international students who come to Turkey from different countries and learn TSL. Therfore, answers will be sought to the following research questions:

- What are the levels of WA and WSE of international students learning TSL?
- Are there any statistically significant differences in WA and WSE levels of international students learning TSL according to gender, education level, whether they like to write and whether they do their writing assignments regularly?
- Are there statistically significant relationships among AOWA, EOWA and WSE levels of international students learning TSL?

2. Method

This current study was carried out as a correlational study that is generally undertaken "to look for and describe relationships that may exist among naturally occurring phenomena, without trying in any way to alter these phenomena" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p.11). In this study, it is aimed to explore the relationship between WA and WSE levels of international students learning TSL.

2.1. Sample

The study population consisted of international students enrolled in different universities in Turkey in the academic year of 2017-2018. The study sample, which was determined using the convenience sampling method, consists of 204 international students. Descriptive statistics regarding the demographic characteristics of the students who make up the sample are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on the demographic characteristics of the students

Demographic characteristics		f	%
Gender	Female	83	40.7
	Male	121	59.3
Language level according to the CEFR	C1	204	100
Education Level	Undergraduate	126	61.8
	Master's	57	27.9
	Doctorate	21	10.3

As seen in Table 1, 121 (59.3%) of the students are male and 83 (40.7%) are female. All students receive language education at C1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). 126 (61.8%) of the students are enrolled in undergraduate programs, 57 (27.9%) in master's and 21 (10.3%) in doctoral programs.

2.2. Instruments

Two different scales were administered to the students to collect the data. The first one is "Writing Self-Efficacy Scale for Students Learning Turkish as a Foreign Language" developed by Gungör and Kan (2015). It was stated that the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of this scale consisting of one factor and 14 items was .95 (Gungör & Kan, 2015). The internal consistency coefficient calculated from the data of this study is .94. The other scale is "Writing Anxiety Scale for Those Who Learn Turkish as a Foreign Language" developed by Şen and Boylu (2017). It was stated that the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of this scale consisting of two factors and 13 items, was .84 and 46.82% of the total variance was explained (Şen & Boylu, 2017). While the internal consistency coefficients calculated from the data of this study are .68 for the scale; .83 for the factor named "Action-Oriented Writing Anxiety" (AOWA) and .66 for the factor named "Environment-Oriented Writing Anxiety"

(EOWA). In addition, the "Personal Information Form" prepared by the researchers was used to collect data about students' demographic characteristics, whether they like to write and whether they do their writing assignments regularly.

2.3. Data analysis

The compatibility of the data collected through the scales with the tests to be performed was examined with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test and it was determined that the AOWA and EOWA scores and the WSE scores of the students did not indicate normal distributions (p <.05). Therefore, the followings were used in the analyses of the data:

- frequency (f) and percentage (%) to describe students' demographic characteristics,
- descriptive statistics to reveal the distributions of AOWA, EOWA and WSE levels,
- Mann-Whitney U test to determine whether students' AOWA, EOWA and WSE levels differ statistically significantly according to gender, whether they like to write and whether they do their writing Assignments regularly,
- Kruskal-Wallis-H test to determine whether students' AOWA, EOWA and WSE levels differ statistically significantly according to students' education levels,
- Spearman's Rank-Difference Coefficients of Correlation to determine whether there are statistically significant relationships between AOWA, EOWA and WSE levels of the students.
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3. Results

3.1. WA and WSE levels of international students learning TSL

Descriptive statistics regarding WA and WSE levels of international students learning TSL are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics on students' WA and WSE levels

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
AOWA	1.14	5.00	3.62	.72
EOWA	1.00	4.50	2.78	.75
WSE	2.07	10.00	7.10	1.67

AOWA and EOWA levels: low=1.00-2.33, moderate =2.34-3.67 and high=3.68-5.00
WSE levels: low=1.00-3.99, moderate =4.00-6.99 and high=7.00-10.00
n = 204

The mean scores of the students in Table 2 show that their AOWA and EOWA levels are moderate whereas their WSE level is high.

3.2. WA and WSE levels of international students learning TSL according to their gender

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test that was conducted to test whether the WA and WSE levels of male and female students indicate any significant difference are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Mann-Whitney U test results on students' WA and WSE levels by gender

	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Rank	U value	p
AOWA	Male	121	110.15	13328.50	4095.50	.03*
	Female	83	91.34	7581.50		
EOWA	Male	121	100.75	12190.50	4809.50	.61
	Female	83	105.05	8719.50		
WSE	Male	121	99.65	12057.50	4676.50	.41
	Female	83	106.66	8852.50		

*p<.05

The analysis results in Table 3 show that there is a significant difference only in AOWA levels of the students (U = 4095.50, p=.03<.05). Calculated mean ranks indicate that male students have a higher level of AOWA than female students.

3.3. WA and WSE levels of international students learning TSL according to their education levels

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test that was conducted to test whether the students' level of WA and WSE differ significantly according to their education levels are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Kruskal-Wallis H test results related to students' WA and WSE levels according to their education levels

	Group	N	Mean Rank	Chi square	df	p	Significant difference
AOWA	Undergraduate	126	99.25	6.10	2	.04*	Undergraduate - Doctorate
	Master's	57	98.61				
	Doctorate	21	132.55				
EOWA	Undergraduate	126	101.54	.23	2	.89	-
	Master's	57	102.54				
	Doctorate	21	108.17				
WSE	Undergraduate	126	106.29	3.06	2	.22	-
	Master's	57	91.09				
	Doctorate	21	110.71				

*p<.05

The analysis results in Table show that there is a significant difference only in the AOWA levels of the doctoral students and undergraduate students (x2=6.10, p=.04<.05). In other words, doctoral students have a higher level of AOWA than undergraduate students.

3.4. WA and WSE levels of international students learning TSL according to whether they like to write

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test that was conducted to test whether the students' levels of WA and WSE differ significantly according to whether they like to write are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Mann-Whitney U test results regarding WA and WSE levels of students according to whether they like to write

	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Rank	U value	p
AOWA	Yes	167	114.40	19105.00	1102.00	.00*
	No	37	48.78	1805.00		
EOWA	Yes	167	100.07	16712.50	2684.50	.21
	No	37	113.45	4197.50		
WSE	Yes	167	102.10	17050.50	3022.50	.84
	No	37	104.31	3859.50		

*p<.05

The analysis results in Table 5 show that there is a significant difference only in the AOWA levels of the students (U = 1102.00, p=.00<.05). The calculated rank means show that students who like to write have a higher level of AOWA than students who do not like to write.

3.5. WA and WSE levels of international students learning TSL according to whether they do writing assignments regularly

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test that was conducted to test whether the students' WA and WSE levels indicate a significant difference according to whether they do writing assignments regularly are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Mann-Whitney U test results regarding students' WA and WSE levels according to whether they do writing assignments regularly

	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Rank	U value	p
AOWA	Yes	156	110.60	17253.50	2480.50	.00*
	No	48	76.18	3656.50		
EOWA	Yes	156	98.18	15316.00	3070.00	.06
	No	48	116.54	5594.00		
WSE	Yes	156	107.55	16777.50	2956.50	.03*
	No	48	86.09	4132.50		
*p<.05						

The analysis results in Table 6 show that there are significant differences in the students' AOWA levels (U = 2480.50, p=.00<.05) and WSE levels (U = 2956.50, p=.03<.05). The calculated rank means show that both the AOWA levels and the WSE levels of the students who do their writing assignments regularly are higher than the students who do not do their writing assignments regularly.

3.6. The relationship between AOWA, EOWA and WSE levels of international students learning TSL

The Spearman's Rank-Difference Coefficients of Correlation, which were calculated to test whether there are statistically significant relationships among the AOWA, EOWA and WSE levels of the students, are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Spearman's Rank-Difference Coefficients of Correlation among AOWA, EOWA and WSE Levels of Students

	EOWA	WSE
AOWA	-.08	.23*
EOWA		-.09
*p<.01		

As seen in Table 7, there is a low and positive correlation between the AOWA and WSE levels of the students (rs=.23, p<.01).

4. Discussion

The affective dimension of writing has a crucial role in the improvement of writing skills of international students who learn Turkish as a second language (TSL). Therefore, affective factors of writing such as anxiety, attitude, and self-efficacy have been the subject of many studies and have been examined in various dimensions in different samples (Buyukikiz, 2011; İşcan, 2015; Maden et al., 2015; Altunkaya & Ateş, 2017; Erdil, 2017; Polatcan, 2019). In this study, international students' WA and WSE were examined and interpreted in in the context of learning TSL.

As one result of the analyses conducted within the scope of this research, it was revealed that international students' WA was at a moderate level. Based on this finding, it may be stated that WA level of the students learning TSL was at a desired level. Because low or high anxiety level has the

potential to negatively affect students' language learning success, writing skills and performances (Horwitz, 1986; Horwitz et al., 1986). Similarly, low anxiety indicates insufficiency of general arousal state whereas high anxiety is considered harmful because it causes behaviors such as stress, fear and avoidance (Maden et al., 2015). Therefore, the fact that students' WA is at a moderate level is a positive finding in terms of learning and development processes of writing skills in TSL. When the literature is examined, it can be seen that there are different study results regarding this finding. For instance, Maden et al. (2015) state in their study that international students mostly experience high levels of WA while İşcan (2015) state that the somatic and social anxiety levels of Jordanian students in their writing skills are high but their cognitive anxiety levels are low.

Another important finding of this research was that WSE level of international students was high. It can be pointed out that students considered themselves competent in writing in TSL and knew their strengths and weaknesses in their writing skills (Taş & Balci, 2019). In addition, it can also be concluded that these students with high WSE perceived themselves as talented and successful in writing (Pajares & Valiante, 1996). Parallel to this finding of the study, Altunkaya and Ateş (2017) state that students have an above-average perception of WSE while Erdil (2017) reports that students have a moderate level of WSE perception.

In this study, while there was no significant difference in EOWA and WSE levels of international students according to their gender; male students had a higher level of AOWA than female students. Based on this finding, it can be assumed that males were more anxious about writing than females. The studies in the related literature indicate that different results are obtained on this subject. For instance, Maden et al. (2015) and Akbulut (2016) state that gender does not cause a difference in WA whereas Cheng (2002) claims that gender causes a change in WA and that female students are more anxious. A similar situation is observed in students' perception of WSE. Buyukikiz (2011), Akbulut (2016), Altunkaya and Ateş (2017) and Erdil (2017) state that gender does not play a role in students' perceptions of WSE. However, Buyukikiz (2011) states that female students' WSE is higher than male students although the difference is statistically insignificant. A similar finding was encountered in this study, and it was found that the WSE level of female students was higher than that of male students even though the difference was statistically insignificant.

While no significant difference was observed in EOWA and WSE levels of international students according to their education levels, doctoral students had higher levels of AOWA than undergraduate students. It is thought that this difference may be due to the quality of writing products expected from doctoral students. Similar to the finding on WSE, Erdil (2017) states that there is no significant difference in WSE according to students' education level.

It was observed that there was a significant difference only in AOWA levels of international students according to their liking to write. It was determined that students who liked to write had a higher level of AOWA than students who did not like to write. This finding can be interpreted as that students who like to write, although they have high WSE, are more anxious while writing because they are careful to write well.

Another finding was that there were significant differences in AOWA and WSE levels of international students according to whether they did their writing assignments regularly. It was seen that both the AOWA and WSE levels of the students who did their writing assignments regularly were higher than the students who did not. Buyukikiz (2011) reports a similar finding that the self-efficacy perceptions of students who do extracurricular writing activities are higher than those who do not. It can be assumed that students' regular writing assignments contribute positively to their WSE. Since the writing skill develops by practicing writing, students' perceptions of competence towards their writing potential also develop. In addition, it is expected that those who do their writing assignments regularly have high WSE. According to this finding, doing writing assignments regularly could be a variable that might cause an increase in action-oriented WA. This may be due to the fact that students' expectations and goals in the writing process increase as they do their writing assignments regularly.

Relationships among the variables of this study were examined, and a low and positive correlation was found between the AOWA and WSE levels of international students. Based on this finding, it can be concluded that students' WSE levels increase as their AOWA levels increase even though the change is at a low level. In other words, this finding indicates that although students found their writing skills in TSL sufficient, they still worried about the act of writing.

5. Conclusions

In this study, international students' WA and WSE were examined and interpreted in in the context of learning TSL. International students' WA was at a moderate level whereas their WSE level was high. There was no significant difference in EOWA and WSE levels of international students according to their gender. But male students had a higher level of AOWA than female students. EOWA and WSE levels of international students did not differ significantly according to their education levels. But doctoral students had higher levels of AOWA than undergraduate students. There was a statistically significant difference only in AOWA levels of international students according to their liking to write. There were significant differences in AOWA and WSE levels of international students according to whether they did their writing assignments regularly. There was a low and positive correlation between the AOWA and WSE levels of international students.

6. Recommendations for Further Studies

Based on the results of this study which emphasizes the affective dimensions of writing skill, some suggestions can be made. For instance, it may be suggested for teachers who teach TSL to international students that they make use of learning and writing activities that will help students have high levels of WSE and medium levels of WA in the learning and teaching process. It may also be suggested that students be given opportunities to participate in writing activities prepared according to student-centered and communication-based approaches, and receive constructive and encouraging feedback and corrections to their writing products. Hence, it can increase students' self-confidence and motivation for writing and contribute to the development of their writing skills. For further studies, it can be suggested that a similar study with a larger sample that can best represent international students in Turkey can be conducted in order to be able to draw more robust and general conclusions. In addition, studies using different research methods such as the mixed method can be studied in more detail and in depth. Finally, examining other cognitive, affective and psychomotor variables that are thought to affect the writing skills of international students will make great contributions to the related literature.

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