



Exploring writing apprehension amongst Afrikaans-speaking first-year students



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Writing apprehension relates to a reluctance to write or even fear of writing and little research has been done on this phenomenon in the South African context, especially in terms of compulsory academic literacy and academic linguistic modules. This article aimed at determining the nature of writing apprehension in these two modules in terms of the Daly and Miller's Writing Apprehension Test (DM-WAT), essay marks and gender at a South African university. The DM-WAT was conducted with two groups of first-year students. An exploratory factor analysis was administered and this led to the identification of four distinct factors which are also associated with related aspects in the literature: positivity towards writing, negativity towards writing, evaluation apprehension and self-efficacy and writing. It is evident that in the context of this study, the chosen instrument could not be used to measure writing apprehension, rather the four identified factors. No linear relationships between essay marks and the identified constructs were clear. Also a practical significant difference between genders was found in terms of the identified constructs. Significantly, students in the compulsory academic literacy module showed a greater tendency towards apprehension in terms of the four identified factors than students from the linguistics module. The chosen instrument could be used to gauge the identified factors. Writing in compulsory academic literacy modules should be taught through individualised student-centred methods, affective support and reflective instruction, positive personal feedback, with additional support through counselling as well as effective modelled writing behaviour from lecturers.

Introduction

This article explores writing apprehension amongst first-year students in a compulsory academic literacy module and a student-selected Afrikaans linguistics module at a South African university. Daly and Miller (1975a:244), in reference to a specific point in time, note that '[o]ur age demands competence in writing'. Writing is an important aspect of higher education and success in higher education depends on the ability to write (Atkinson 2011:1; Pajares 2003:141). As attitudes towards writing vary amongst individuals (Daly & Wilson 1983:327), it is important to consider writing apprehension as a variable in learning, teaching and assessment of written work.

Apart from Daly and Miller's initial work (Daly 1978; Daly & Miller 1975a, 1975b) on writing apprehension, many other related studies have been conducted using the Daly and Miller's Writing Apprehension Test (DM-WAT) in different contexts and with different instruments and in combination with various other testing instruments (cf. Atkinson 2011:3–4; Cornwell & McKay 2000; Daly & Wilson 1983; Faigley, Daly & Witte 1981; Pappalardo 2010:36–38; Todd 2003:20–22). However, research in this regard is lacking in the South African context.

This article aims at exploring the use of the DM-WAT with two South African Afrikaans-speaking groups of first-year students in order to determine the nature of writing apprehension in an academic linguistics module versus an academic literacy module in terms of the DM-WAT, essay marks and gender in a selected South African university.

The concept of writing apprehension is explored in this article, followed by some study background in terms of the research population, ethical considerations and the instrument, the DM-WAT, used in this study. The final section of this article relates to the data analysis with the focus on collection and statistical analysis, construct validity and reliability of the measuring instrument, as well as a discussion on the main findings and some recommendations.

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Literature review

Some individuals experience writing as a very challenging task. Furthermore, the act of writing is often viewed as a very daunting experience (Brennan 1995:352). According to Teichman and Poris (1989:94), some 'students find writing an uncomfortable, punishing, and even fearful experience'. Bothma and Cloete (1964:23) state that most students experience writing essays as an artificial and not very pleasant activity. Lecturers need to be able to make writing desirable for students; however, Bothma and Cloete (1964:5) are of the opinion that the methods used to teach writing can cause some students to get an aversion to writing, which could result in writing apprehension. Furthermore, Daly (1978:10) states that '[t]he 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' (cf. Daly & Wilson 1983:327; Faigley *et al.* 1981:16; Fox 1980:39).

This study falls within the theoretical framework of the affective model (cf. Hayes 1996:11–12). It is important to note that the concept of *affect* encompasses various 'constructs and processes' (McLeod 1991:97) and as such emotion is but an example of an affective state. In this regard, McLeod (1991:99) refers to writing anxiety as '[o]ne of the most studied affective states' whilst emphasising that in such instances the individuals with writing anxiety display 'state anxiety', where they are anxious only in specific writing circumstances. Martinez, Kock and Cass (2011:358) emphasise that writing anxiety is a multidimensional construct. As such, writing apprehension has often been examined in terms of the affective model or domain and is seen as one of the many affective factors that might influence academic writing performance (Gustilo 2010; McLeod 1987, 1991, 1997:11; Rose 2009:2).

Apart from avoidance of writing altogether, some typical characteristics of the nature of writing by writing apprehensives have been identified. The writing of highly apprehensive individuals is shorter, syntactically restricted, has fewer qualifications, shows lower levels of language intensity and is of poorer quality (cf. Cornwell & McKay 2000:119; Daly and Wilson 1983:328; Faigley *et al.* 1981:19).

An important factor influencing writing apprehension is writing self-efficacy (cf. Martinez *et al.* 2011:352–353). Bandura (1997:3) defines self-efficacy as 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments'. This self-efficacy contributes to a student's degree of motivation. Martinez *et al.* (2011:357) found that '[s]tudents with higher levels of writing anxiety reported lower levels of writing self-efficacy than those students with low anxiety'.

The relationship between writing apprehension and performance is evident from the literature. Daly (1978:13) found that individuals with low writing apprehension perform better than those with high apprehension on a test of

writing skills, whilst individuals with moderate apprehension perform in between – forming a continuum of apprehension. Furthermore, he notes that '[h]igh apprehensives not only write differently and with lower quality than low apprehensives, but, in addition, fail to demonstrate as strong a working knowledge of writing skills as low apprehensives' (cf. Pappalardo 2010:37). However, Pajares and Johnson (1994:321, 325) did not observe a relationship between apprehension and performance in their study.

Earlier work on the phenomenon of writing apprehension included observational interviews by Phillips as well as the measuring of physiological measures (e.g. galvanic skin response and heartbeat measures) by researchers such as Porter (cf. Daly & Miller 1975a:243). In the recent literature, the prominence of the work of John A. Daly and Michael D. Miller, as creators of the DM-WAT, is evident. However, Daly and Miller were not the first individuals to use self-report instruments to assess writing apprehension. In this regard, Daly and Miller (1975a:243) also note the work of Friedrich, McCroskey, Heston and Paterline, as well as Wheelless in the 1970s. Drawing from the background provided by these authors in terms of communication, speaking and receiver apprehension, they compiled the DM-WAT (Cornwell & McKay 2000:118). Research that followed these initial works focussed on the inclusion of additional variables such as field of study and writing audience (Atkinson 2011:3–4). Recent studies on writing apprehension even included a focus on the role of technology and related computer apprehension (cf. Harris & Grandgenett 1992; Todd 2003:70–73).

It is also important to note that writing apprehension may be associated with other, more general language-related fears. Writing apprehension is, for example, also related to communication apprehension (cf. Atkinson 2011:2; Daly & Miller 1975a:243–244). In this regard, Daly and Miller (1975a:243) state that '[t]he highly apprehensive individual will avoid communication situations or react in some anxious manner if forced into them because he foresees primarily negative consequences from such engagements'. Despite this reaction towards writing, language teaching requires various interactions in written and spoken communication. It is, however, important to determine the origin of writing apprehension and, by implication, communication apprehension.

Gender differences have been reported in previous studies, with boys having higher levels of 'negative writing satisfaction' as well as 'less writing enjoyment' (Hansen 2001:2, 14, 15). Similarly, in a study with 246 university students, Daly and Miller (1975b:255) found that 'females had significantly lower scores than males on the writing apprehension measure'. Pajares (2003:148–151) also noted stronger confidence in writing amongst females. In contrast to the aforementioned studies, Reeves (1997:42) and Martinez *et al.* (2011:356) related how higher writing apprehension was identified amongst females. In terms of gender as a variable, it is also important to note that this aspect is socially

constructed and might imply additional influences and associations depending on the context.

Writing apprehension is not necessarily established at university. Students' confidence in terms of writing is already formed at school level (Pajares & Johnson 1994:328). In this regard Faigley *et al.* (1981:16) state: 'Negative teacher responses to early writing attempts affect later levels of writing anxiety. Positive skill development and reinforcement leads to less apprehension'. Hence, writing apprehension needs to be addressed at an early stage. Fox (1980:39) agrees and notes that writing apprehension needs to be reduced before students can 'overcome their inhibitions about writing and its subsequent evaluation'. However, once students reach university, it is important to look at how writing apprehension can firstly be determined and then recognised in language and academic literacy classrooms. This article is an attempt at exploring this issue in the South African context. Based on the literature review, the following hypothesis is set: there is a significant relationship between writing apprehension levels and writing performance of Afrikaans-speaking first-year students at a South African university.

The article also poses the following research questions:

- What is the nature of writing apprehension in an academic linguistics module versus an academic literacy module, offered at a South African university, as measured by the DM-WAT?
- Is there a relationship between writing apprehension and essay marks obtained by first-year students in an academic linguistics module and in an academic literacy module?
- Does gender influence writing apprehension levels in a selected group of South African students?

Methodology

Research population

Two groups of first-year students ($N = 545$) were used in this study. The research population consisted of a convenience sample of students enrolled in an Afrikaans linguistics module ($n_1 = 245$) as well as an academic literacy compulsory module ($n_2 = 300$). The Afrikaans linguistics module consisted of 67 male (27%) and 178 female (73%) students, whilst the academic literacy module had 100 male (33%) and 200 female (67%) students. These modules were relevant as both had a strong emphasis on writing within an academic context.

Ethical considerations

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and informed consent was obtained from all the participants. Furthermore, participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point. As the authors of this article are also lecturers of the selected participants, a student assistant conducted the data collection outside the official class times. Ethical clearance for this research was granted (ethics number

NWU-00330-14-A7) by the North-West University Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (NWU-RERC) as part of a project on academic literacy.

Instrument: Daly and Miller's Writing Apprehension Test

The phenomenon of writing apprehension has been measured by means of observational interview approaches, physiological measures as well as factor-based self-report instruments (Daly & Miller 1975a:243). In this study, a self-report instrument was chosen, because, as Daly and Miller (1975a:244) state, with these instruments '[t]he expense is small, the administration simple and quick, and the measurement more general and oriented towards the trait anxiety'.

Daly and Miller developed the DM-WAT to measure writing apprehension amongst students (Daly & Miller 1975a). The instrument involves 26 statements with a Likert-type scale containing the following values: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) are uncertain, (4) disagree and (5) strongly disagree. Daly and Miller (1975a:246) propose the following formula for the instrument: *Writing Apprehension* = 78 – *Positive Scores* + *Negative Scores*. In this regard, Cornwell and McKay (2000:123) note the misprint with the plus and minus signs in swapped positions in the original Daly and Miller article; hence, the corrected formula is provided above. The positive scores relate to items that indicate a positive tendency towards writing apprehension (such as 'I avoid writing' and 'I'm nervous about writing'), whilst the negative scores relate to a negative tendency (such as 'I have no fear of my writing being evaluated' and 'Writing is a lot of fun').

It is clear from the literature that the DM-WAT has shown validity and reliability for specific research populations (Cornwell & McKay 2000; Daly 1978; Daly & Miller 1975a, 1975b; Fox 1980; Todd 2003:84).

Although not the focus of this study, it is important to note that DM-WAT has also been used in second language (L2) learning contexts (cf. Cornwell & McKay 2000:115, 119–121). In the South African context, this poses interesting possibilities in terms of the exploration of writing apprehension in multilingual environments.

For the purposes of this study, the DM-WAT (cf. Appendix 1) was translated into Afrikaans as the respondents were all Afrikaans-speaking students. Hence, the validity and reliability (cf. 'Construct validity and reliability of the measuring instrument' section) of this specific test also had to be determined.

Data collection and analysis

Collection and analysis

The DM-WAT was completed by students at the beginning of the semester before any intervention or feedback on writing assignments by lecturers. The writing assignments involved

essays completed by the students as part of the continuous assessment of both modules. For the sake of comparison, both sets of assessment criteria were similar and the raters compared and discussed ratings of the first 10 randomly selected essays from both groups in order to ensure that the assessment was done in a similar manner. The data were captured in Microsoft Excel and the incomplete questionnaires (two in total) were removed. Statistical Analysis System (SAS) software (2011) was used for the data analysis. A factor analysis as well as reliability testing was conducted. As no random sampling was done, *p*-values cannot be used to interpret the data; however, for the sake of completeness, they are reported. Because of the nature of the sampling, Cohen's *d*-values were used to draw conclusions.

Construct validity and reliability of the measuring instrument

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the 26 items of the DM-WAT. For the sake of statistical analysis, the directions of the questionnaire items were adapted so that they were all negative statements. In contrast to the DM-WAT (Daly & Miller 1975a, 1975b), where only one construct is used, this study identified four distinct factors from the factor analysis (Tables 1 and 2).

TABLE 1: Factor loadings.

Questions	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Question 10	0.84748	-	-	-
Question 15	0.83968	-	-	-
Question 17	0.83761	-	-	-
Question 19	0.71725	-	-	-
Question 9	0.63104	-	-	-
Question 3	0.52635	-	-	-
Question 5	-0.44918	-	-	0.37881
Question 1	-0.57873	-	-	-
Question 8	-0.70594	-	-	-
Question 26	-	0.81533	-	-
Question 24	-	0.8112	-	-
Question 18	-	0.71761	-	-
Question 16	-	0.69458	-	-
Question 22	-	0.67665	-	-
Question 7	-	0.53545	-	-
Question 13	-	0.53139	-	-
Question 21	-	0.50866	-	-
Question 14	-	-0.43027	-	0.34495
Question 23	-	-0.58685	-	-
Question 2	-	-	0.78232	-
Question 6	0.32439	-	0.37404	-
Question 25	-	0.43728	-0.53820	-
Question 4	-	-	-0.65793	-
Question 12	-	-	-	0.69058
Question 11	-	-0.46453	-	0.42391
Question 20	0.37081	-	-	0.4236

TABLE 2: Exploratory factor analysis and Kaiser's measure of sample adequacy.

Factor	Question	N	MSA	Variance explained (%)	Communalities variance
Factor 1: Positivity towards writing	1, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 15, 17 and 19				
Factor 2: Negativity towards writing	7, 13, 14, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24 and 26	545	0.94	56.1	0.33–0.62
Factor 3: Evaluation apprehension	2, 4, 6 and 25				
Factor 4: Self-efficacy and writing	11, 12 and 20				

MSA, measure of sample adequacy.

The above-mentioned four factors were identified and named according to the questionnaire contents and the related literature (cf. Cornwell & McKay 2000:129) and are summarised in Table 2 in terms of Kaiser's measure of sample adequacy (MSA).

The value of MSA in Table 2 is very satisfactory at 0.94 and can be described as 'meritorious' as it is above 0.8 (cf. Hair *et al.* 2014:102). The four factors explain a variance of 56.1% in contrast to only 38% when the questions are considered as one factor: writing apprehension (Daly & Miller 1975a, 1975b).

Furthermore, the reliability of the results of the four different factors was also determined. Table 3 shows the Cronbach's alpha for each of the factors.

In all four instances, the value has been satisfactory with Cronbach's alpha higher than 0.60, which is acceptable for exploratory research (cf. Hair *et al.* 2014:123).

Comparison in terms of essay marks, gender and the type of module

In this study, essay marks and gender were also considered in the statistical analysis. According to Pearson's correlation coefficient, no linear relationships between essay marks and any of the constructs could be identified. Furthermore, the data grouped together under the four factors were also compared in terms of gender and module. However, no practical significance was determined.

The respondents came from two distinct modules: an Afrikaans language module and an Afrikaans-medium compulsory academic literacy module. The results obtained from the two groups of students are shown in Table 4.

Because the research population was drawn from two distinct modules (an Afrikaans language module and an Afrikaans-medium compulsory academic literacy module), the groups were therefore compared. It is evident from Table 4 that there is a statistically significant difference between the responses from the respondents in the Afrikaans language module and those in the Afrikaans-medium compulsory academic literacy module. Considering

TABLE 3: Cronbach's alpha for the four identified factors.

Factor	Cronbach's α
1	0.88
2	0.89
3	0.71
4	0.70

TABLE 4: Comparison by module.

Factor	Afrikaans mean	Academic literacy mean	<i>t</i> -test	Degrees of freedom	<i>p</i> -value	<i>d</i>
Factor 1: Positivity towards writing	3.89	3.25	9.34	543	< 0.001*	0.8 ^a
Factor 2: Negativity towards writing	3.68	3.26	7.13	543	< 0.001*	0.6 ^b
Factor 3: Evaluation apprehension	3.64	3.44	2.88	543	0.004*	0.25
Factor 4: Self-efficacy and writing	3.28	2.86	4.80	543	< 0.001*	0.41

^a, Practically significant according to Cohen.

^b, Medium effect in practice according to Cohen.

*, Statistically significant at 0.05 level according to *t*-test results for independent groups.

that, for the sake of statistical analysis, the statements were all changed to the same direction (in this case negative), a higher score would mean less agreement with the group of statements and a lower score would mean greater agreement (cf. Appendix 1). The respondents of the Afrikaans linguistics module tended to have less agreement with negative statements regarding *positivity towards writing*, *negativity towards writing*, *evaluation apprehension* and *self-efficacy and writing* compared to those of the compulsory academic literacy module. However, only *positivity towards writing* and *negativity towards writing* displayed practical as well as statistical significance in differences between the two groups. Hence, the respondents from the academic literacy module showed a greater tendency towards apprehension in terms of the four identified factors. This finding supports the literature (Atkinson 2011:3–4; Todd 2003:141) in that writing apprehension is especially found amongst students in writing intensive curriculums.

Discussion

An important result of this study is the fact that, in this context and with this specific research population, the DM-WAT cannot be interpreted as a single factor (writing apprehension). Rather, the results obtained in this study suggest that four distinct factors are measured with this instrument. Hence, for this specific population, the DM-WAT seems to be (especially in its current format) an outdated research instrument; however, the responses of the test could still be meaningful if a factor analysis is conducted. Importantly, the identified factors do relate to the four factors singled out by Cornwell and McKay (2000:129). In Table 5, the factors identified, using the DM-WAT, in this study are listed first, followed by the factors of Cornwell and McKay (2000) in italics.

Although the descriptions from the two studies do not correspond exactly in all statements from the DM-WAT, the similarity of the factors is clear. Cornwell and McKay (2000:130–131) ascribe the multiple factors to the following reasons: (1) writing apprehension manifesting in a different manner because of cultural differences, (2) writing in the L2, (3) the test being developed in the 1970s, (4) the move from a rhetoric-based approach to writing with the emphasis on the product to a process approach and (5) the emphasis in the DM-WAT on evaluation.

The four identified factors are briefly discussed in terms of the relevant literature, followed by an overview of the

TABLE 5: Factors comparison of the DM-WAT and Cornwell and McKay.

Factors	Relevant statements
Positivity towards writing	1, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 15, 17, 19
Enjoyment of writing	1, 3, 8, 10, 15, 17
Negativity towards writing	7, 13, 14, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26
Negative perceptions about writing ability	7, 11, 13, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26
Evaluation apprehension	2, 4, 6, 5
Fear of evaluation	2, 4, 5, 25
Self-efficacy and writing	11, 12, 20
Showing my writing to others	6, 9, 12, 14, 19, 20

Source: Cornwell, S. & McKay, T., 2000, 'Establishing a valid, reliable measure of writing apprehension for Japanese students', *Japan Association for Language Teaching Journal* 22(1), 114–139

DM-WAT, Daly and Miller's Writing Apprehension Test.

implications of this study in terms of essay marks, gender and the type of module.

Factor 1: Positivity towards writing

This factor relates to not only lower (or even the absence of) writing apprehension, but also a tendency to enjoy writing and being content in having others read what has been written. In this regard, Brunton (2009:29) notes that 'having a positive attitude is vital to successful learning' (cf. Pajares 2003:146–148, 154). This aspect also relates to the fact that, in terms of language learning, Krashen (1981:5) believes that attitudinal and motivational factors are of greater importance than aptitude. In contrast to this factor, negative attitudes towards writing were also evident from the DM-WAT.

Factor 2: Negativity towards writing

The negativity towards writing factor relates to anxiety when writing, inability to write, experiences of poor evaluations as well as doubts in writing abilities and standards. As with the previous factor, attitudinal and motivational issues are also very relevant for this factor. Despite the fact that poor evaluation is envisaged under this factor, a distinct factor relating to fear of evaluation was also evident. Hence, evaluation apprehension was also considered.

Factor 3: Evaluation apprehension

The statements grouped together under this factor focus on four fairly similar issues: fear of being assessed, not feeling good when handing in written work, not liking essays being assessed and fear of writing essays when they are intended for assessment. These statements do not relate to fear of writing, rather to a fear activated by the possibility

of being evaluated or assessed. In terms of evaluation apprehension, Daly and Miller (1975a:244) state that '[i]ndividuals with high apprehension of writing would fear evaluation of their writing, for example, feeling that they will be negatively rated on it'. As stated earlier (see 'Literature review' section), writing apprehension often occurs based on teachers' responses to writing, for example.

Especially, the evaluation associated with writing would influence self-esteem. According to Daly and Wilson (1983:329), '[a] person's apprehension about writing develops, and is maintained, at least in part, from others' evaluations of his or her writing'. In this regard, Pajares and Johnson (1994:326) state that students might perceive themselves as competent writers and that criticism of writing might be interpreted as criticism of the students themselves.

This factor can also potentially lead to certain attitudinal and motivational issues concerning writing (cf. factors 1 and 2) as well as influence self-efficacy and writing as discussed in the next section.

Factor 4: Self-efficacy and writing

The final factor involves having self-confidence in being able to express ideas in writing, liking it when friends are reading one's written work and enjoying discussing one's writing with others. These issues also relate to students' self-efficacy (cf. Martinez *et al.* 2011). Daly and Wilson (1983:329) make the link between self-esteem and writing apprehension and indicate that students with high writing apprehension tend to feel less positive about themselves. Moreover, they also state that, because self-esteem is related to an individual's portrayal of the self, writing 'with its highly intentional nature and required effort, is sometimes directly, and almost always indirectly, an exposure of self to others'.

People's behaviour is influenced by their self-efficacy or beliefs that are maintained about their capabilities (cf. Pajares 2003:140). Pajares (2003:141) notes that 'students' confidence in their writing capabilities influence[s] their writing motivation as well as various writing outcomes in school'.

Bandura (1977:129) states that, in the process of self-regulated writing, 'some people are such critical self-editors that they essentially paralyze their own writing efforts'. However, Pajares and Johnson (1994:326) found no relationship between writing apprehension and writing self-efficacy (cf. Pappalardo 2010:24). Bandura (1977:80) notes that '[p]erceived self-efficacy not only reduces anticipatory fears and inhibitions but, through expectations of eventual success, it affects coping efforts once they are initiated'; therefore, the role of self-efficacy cannot be ignored.

Moreover, Pappalardo (2010:114) notes that students with low writing apprehension sometimes overestimate their own writing skills. In this study, self-efficacy or at least an aspect thereof, especially in relation to the perceptions of writing by others, could possibly be assessed by means of the DM-WAT.

Apart from the four factors mentioned above, essay marks, gender and the type of module were also regarded as important variables in this study as they are associated with the concept of writing apprehension in the literature.

Essay marks

Despite the fact that Daly and Miller (1975a:248) noted that 'the instrument would be predictive of classroom variables such as success in compositions', as stated before (cf. 'Comparison in terms of essay marks, gender and the type of module' section), this result was not confirmed in this study.

According to the literature (Pajares & Johnson 1994:315), previous studies noted correlations between essay marks and writing apprehension. However, Pajares and Johnson (1994:325) also found in their study that, despite an increase in confidence and competence in completing writing tasks amongst their research subjects, writing apprehension remained. Faigley *et al.* (1981:20) concluded: 'Writing apprehension is not assumed causally to lead to poorer writing nor is poorer writing assumed causally to result in apprehension. Most likely the relationship is bi-directional; apprehension and performance probably reinforce one another'. Despite this fact, the presence of writing apprehension or even negativity towards writing and evaluation apprehension may still influence general attitudes towards language classes and cause anxiety that does not necessarily translate into poor marks.

Gender

The literature tends to show higher writing apprehension amongst either females (Martinez *et al.* 2011; Reeves 1997) or males (Daly & Miller 1975b; Hansen 2001; Pajares 2003). However, in this study, no practical significant difference was noted when the genders were compared in terms of the four identified factors.

Modules: Compulsory versus selected

This study involved students from a compulsory academic literacy module and a student-selected Afrikaans linguistics module. The fact that the respondents from the academic literacy module showed a greater tendency towards apprehension in terms of the four identified factors links up with the literature. In this regard, Daly (1978:10) states that '[t]hose with high apprehension about writing select academic subjects and jobs which they perceive as having significantly lower writing requirements' (cf. Daly & Miller 1975b:250; Daly & Wilson 1983:328; Faigley *et al.* 1981:16; Pappalardo 2010:37, 42; Reeves 1997:38).

Clearly, compulsory academic literacy courses that were designed to support students with their writing may end up alienating many students. Powers, Cook and Meyer (1979:228) support this view as they found that compulsory academic writing could increase writing apprehension. Interventions, such as compulsory academic literacy courses, often include additional writing tasks which may contribute to negativity. According to Daly and Miller (1975b:255), '[n]ot only do high apprehensives report an unwillingness to take more course work in writing, but indeed they seem to indicate this in their behaviors'.

The result of this study emphasises the importance of sensitivity towards writing apprehension (and, by implication, attitude towards writing, evaluation apprehension and self-efficacy and writing) in compulsory academic literacy modules. Furthermore, a subject-specific approach to writing seems to be a better alternative for writing instruction, at least in terms of writing apprehension. However, this aspect needs to be researched further in other fields and contexts.

Limitations

It is crucial to acknowledge some limitations in terms of the research conducted. Firstly, the conclusions derived from this study cannot be generalised as the research population used in this study is but a selection from a larger population at a selected South African university. In addition, the population is limited to a specific university and to Afrikaans language speakers. Furthermore, the conclusions are limited in terms of the methodology where writing apprehension was only investigated in terms of the DM-WAT. In this regard, future research and follow-up studies should include qualitative data to further examine the reasons behind writing apprehension. However, despite the limitations of the research population and the methodology used, this study has led to more insights into the phenomenon of writing apprehension amongst Afrikaans-speaking university students.

Recommendations

Based on the aforementioned exploration of writing apprehension, and specifically attitude towards writing, evaluation apprehension and self-efficacy and writing, a few practical recommendations are made for language classrooms.

Firstly, the way in which writing is integrated in teaching and learning needs to be addressed. Fox (1980:48–49) concludes that 'structured, student-centered methods of teaching writing' can reduce writing apprehension. Furthermore, Pappalardo (2010:148) states that '[t]eaching strategies such as modeling, affective support, and reflective instruction seemed to have a larger impact on student attitudes concerning writing than did teaching style'.

Pajares (2003:153) emphasises the importance of nurturing students' self-beliefs.

Similarly, Reeves (1997) suggests a number of ways in which writing apprehension could be countered. He notes the importance of letting apprehensives write more, letting apprehensives take ownership of their writing, listening to fearful writers and talking about experiences, finding patterns in errors and contextualizing and customizing grammar teaching (1997:39–40). Furthermore, he also mentions collaboration with the drafting of writing as well as evaluation, coaching of peers for adequate responses, encouraging positive self-talk, being aware of gender differences, varying writing modes, monitoring attitudes, introducing discourse communities, talking about writers, giving and attending lectures, and sharing writing (1997:40–44).

Apart from teaching strategies, specific individualised instructional materials can be useful, as Faigley *et al.* (1981:20) state that 'different instructional materials and methods may need to be used for highly apprehensive writers given their differential performance in writing'. Despite the fact that Daly and Miller (1975a:248) assert that forcing students to write can reinforce the 'punishing nature of the writing act', Fox (1980:48) contends that the manner in which students are compelled to write is also important.

The nature of feedback on writing seems to be a very important aspect. In a study on how students cope with writing apprehension, Atkinson (2011:17) stated that '[a] more effective learning and writing process may be attainable by revisiting the application of communication theory to remedial writing situations in higher education' and by employing 'positive personal feedback' (Atkinson 2011:16). Pajares and Johnson (1994:327) also emphasise the importance of lecturers and their feedback in developing students' self-efficacy. Furthermore, Atkinson (2011:16) makes the following comment in this regard:

In this case, the instructor's message would be centered on their belief in the student's abilities and respect for the work ethic and academic maturity displayed. The constructive criticism dealing with writing as the practice of a craft could be sandwiched in a message to focus the need for improvement from a skills perspective.

Despite the merits of positive feedback, Fox (1980:48) warns against 'indoctrinating students with false or sugar-coated notions about their own abilities' and to 'avoid leading students to believe they were better writers than they actually were'. Fox (1980:48) does, however, emphasise that students must be made aware of the positive qualities in their writing.

Additional support for writing apprehensives can also be beneficial. According to Daly and Miller (1975a:248), 'effective treatments' of writing apprehension include 'counseling programs where the apprehensive writer would be allowed

to view writing as a successful experience', behaviour therapies and systematic desensitisation.

The writing of lecturers or teachers themselves (as well as their own approaches and apprehensions towards writing) may also prove instrumental in classroom contexts (cf. Reeves 1997:44). To increase self-efficacy, Pappalardo (2010:115–116) suggests modelling behaviour through teachers writing with students, facilitating a mastery experience by letting students redo writing based on teachers' comments, social persuasion through praise by teachers and students, as well as keeping psychological conditions such as apprehension and fear in mind.

Conclusion

Writing apprehension relates to a reluctance to write or even fear of writing. The DM-WAT has been successfully used in the past to investigate this construct. In this study, involving two groups of South African Afrikaans-speaking students enrolled in an Afrikaans linguistics module as well as an academic literacy compulsory module, four distinct factors were determined from the factor analysis of the collected data. These factors were *positivity towards writing*, *negativity towards writing*, *evaluation apprehension* and *self-efficacy and writing*. Furthermore, students' essay marks, gender and the type of module were explored in terms of the four identified factors.

In the context of this study, and with this specific research population, it was determined that the DM-WAT can be used to gauge specific aspects (e.g. positivity towards writing, negativity towards writing, evaluation apprehension and self-efficacy and writing). However, there were no linear relationships between essay marks and the identified constructs in this study. A comparison between writing apprehension and module marks, as well as scores from standardised academic literacy tests, could possibly show different results. Furthermore, no practical significant difference in genders was determined in terms of the identified constructs.

However, a significant amount of students in the compulsory academic literacy module showed a greater tendency towards writing apprehension in terms of the four identified factors. In terms of instruction, writing apprehension must be considered by lecturers. It is therefore important for writing, especially in compulsory academic literacy modules, to be taught through individualised student-centred methods, with affective support and reflective instruction, positive personal feedback, additional support through counselling as well as effective modelled writing behaviour from lecturers.

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Competing interests

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Authors' contributions

L.O. and J.O. were both equally responsible for the collection and analysis of data as well as the writing of this article.

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APPENDIX 1

Question	Answer				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I avoid writing. (+)	1	2	3	4	5
2. I have no fear of my writing being evaluated. (-)	1	2	3	4	5
3. I look forward to writing down my ideas. (-)	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be evaluated. (+)	1	2	3	4	5
5. Taking a composition course is a very frightening experience. (+)	1	2	3	4	5
6. Handing in a composition makes me feel good. (-)	1	2	3	4	5
7. My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on my composition. (+)	1	2	3	4	5
8. Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time. (+)	1	2	3	4	5
9. I would enjoy submitting my writing to magazines for evaluation and publication. (-)	1	2	3	4	5
10. I like to write down my ideas. (-)	1	2	3	4	5
11. I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas clearly in writing. (-)	1	2	3	4	5
12. I like to have my friends read what I have written. (-)	1	2	3	4	5
13. I am nervous about writing. (+)	1	2	3	4	5
14. People seem to enjoy what I write. (-)	1	2	3	4	5
15. I enjoy writing. (-)	1	2	3	4	5
16. I never seem to be able to write down my ideas clearly. (+)	1	2	3	4	5
17. Writing is a lot of fun. (-)	1	2	3	4	5
18. I expect to do poorly in composition classes even before I enter them. (+)	1	2	3	4	5
19. I like seeing my thoughts on paper. (-)	1	2	3	4	5
20. Discussing my writing with others is enjoyable. (-)	1	2	3	4	5
21. I have a terrible time organising my ideas in a composition course. (+)	1	2	3	4	5
22. When I hand in a composition, I know I am going to do poorly. (+)	1	2	3	4	5
23. It is easy for me to write good compositions. (-)	1	2	3	4	5
24. I do not think I write as well as most other people do. (+)	1	2	3	4	5
25. I do not like my compositions to be evaluated. (+)	1	2	3	4	5
26. I am not good at writing. (+)	1	2	3	4	5