

*Investigating the Effect of Motivational Scaffolding on Writing Apprehension  
Among EFL Undergraduate Students*

Mouna Ayadi, University of Sfax, Tunisia

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**Abstract**

Although studies on writing apprehension in the writing of native learners have been conducted extensively, studies on EFL learners are insufficient. For this reason, the current study investigates the impact of motivational scaffolding on EFL students' writing achievement and writing apprehension. The total number of participants was 60, who were divided into two groups: experimental and control groups. The study adopted the Daly-Miller questionnaire of writing apprehension (WAT). The collected data for this study were fed into SPSS and then analyzed to examine the issue at hand. Mean scores, Pearson correlation, T-test and multiple regression were employed to answer the research questions. The results of this study showed that most of the participants experienced medium writing apprehension. The results also proved that age and gender do not correlate with writing apprehension. Furthermore, the analysis of the post-test results yielded  $p = .030$ , which was smaller than 0.05, demonstrating that motivational scaffolding can significantly improve EFL undergraduate students' writing achievement.

Keywords: Scaffolding, Motivational Scaffolding, Writing Apprehension

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## 1. Introduction

Writing is an important skill for today's global communication. According to Dockrell et al. (2018), writing is a valuable skill that enhances communication abilities, both manually and electronically. Ineffective writing skills can lead to diminished academic performance. Therefore, enhancing writing skills is imperative for achieving success in various aspects of life.

Writing is an active skill that must be acquired. Students must master various forms and processes of writing, such as grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. Students are afraid of writing due to their limited vocabulary, which hinders their ability to express ideas clearly, and their struggle with organizing thoughts effectively. Daoud (1998) observes that writing difficulties, such as lack of motivation and proficiency, are linked to challenges in mastering the writing process. Erkan and Saban (2011) argue that the increasing complexity of writing tasks heightens anxiety levels among students, leading to difficulties in writing. This challenge affects students' attitudes, increases apprehension, and undermines their self-efficacy (p. 166).

Daly and Miller (1975) first introduced the term Writing Apprehension. This concept is defined as “a situation- and subject specific individual difference associated with a person’s tendencies to approach or avoid situations perceived to potentially require writing accompanied by some amount of perceived evaluation” (Daly and Wilson, 1983, p. 327). The negative effects of writing anxiety can manifest in the form of negative attitudes toward writing, avoidance of writing tasks, and ultimately, poor writing performance. It is crucial for teachers to acknowledge and proactively address writing apprehension in their students to foster successful writing outcomes.

Research indicates that writing anxiety varies by gender. McAllister (2014) found that female students experience lower anxiety levels compared to males, primarily attributed to the constructive feedback they receive from teachers. However, Pajares and Valiante (2001) argue that self-efficacy and previous writing experiences have a greater impact on writing anxiety, making gender less important. Marshall and Varnon (2009) found that writing apprehension levels did not vary significantly across different age groups among undergraduate accounting seniors. Similarly, Rosen and Maguire (1990) found no notable correlation between age and computer anxiety. Simons et al. (1995) found that computer anxiety was more strongly associated with self-perceived computer ability than with gender or prior experience. These findings indicate that increasing self-efficacy, such as through computer skills training, can reduce computer anxiety.

A certain degree of anxiety exists and is required in all writers, but for others, the scenario causes a detrimental extra strain. Studies have indicated that low apprehensive students have better performance on tests than high apprehensive students. Daly (1979) states, “The individual who is highly apprehensive finds the experience of writing more punishing than rewarding and, as a consequence, avoids it” (p. 37). In research, causes of writing apprehension vary. Kara (2013) identified four sources of student anxiety, which are poor writing habits, necessary skills and strategies, teacher support, and appropriate course book examples and exercises (pp. 108–109). Chin and Shuan (2009) noticed that writing apprehension is primarily caused by grading, time constraints, uninteresting subjects, fear of negative feedback from teachers, and peer competition. Their findings highlight the importance of providing a safe environment for students to express themselves.

Other studies were conducted to explore correlations between writing apprehension and writing performance. Sarkhoush (2013) examined the correlation between writing apprehension, attitude, and performance and found that Iranian EFL learners with positive attitudes outperform students with negative attitudes. In addition, she found that Iranian EFL students with low apprehension perform significantly better than those with high apprehension (Sarkhoush, 2013; p. 1131). Furthermore, Asmari (2013) investigated the relationship between writing apprehension, writing strategies, and writing achievement. Saudi EFL learners' writing apprehension seems to affect their use of writing strategies and, therefore, their writing achievement. Asmari (2013) states that the study "demonstrate the participants' low awareness of writing strategies. These findings also indicate that the students' apprehension badly affected their use of strategies and their writing achievement." (p.136). The study underscores the necessity of implementing targeted interventions to address EFL learners' writing apprehension and equipping them with tailored writing strategies to enhance their writing achievement.

Scaffolding is a teaching strategy that is still identified as effective in recent research. In classrooms, scaffolding is commonly used to help students understand complex mathematical problems by breaking them down into simpler steps and providing guidance until they can solve the problems independently. Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development inspired the concept of scaffolding. It involves tailored guidance, feedback, and modeling from a knowledgeable individual to help a learner accomplish tasks beyond their current abilities. In his seminal work, Vygotsky (1986) explained the metaphor of scaffolding and identified the first level as the child's independent thinking ability and the second level as the child's collaborative skills in task completion. The first developmental level, or actual level, describes how well a child can think independently, while the second level gauges how well they can work with others to complete tasks.

In scaffolding instruction, a more experienced individual provides supports or scaffolds to aid in the development of the learner. Scaffolds facilitate a student's ability to connect with prior knowledge and internalize new information effectively. Van Der Stuyf (2002) emphasizes that a more capable individual offers scaffolds to assist learners in completing tasks beyond their current abilities, guiding them through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) for optimal learning.

According to McKenzie (2000), scaffolding has eight characteristics: providing clear direction, clarifying purposes, keeping students on task, offering assessment to clarify expectations, pointing students to worthy sources, reducing uncertainty and disappointment, delivering efficiency, and creating momentum. These characteristics are crucial for effective teaching and learning, as they serve as a framework for teachers to assist students in their learning, leading to improved outcomes. Teachers can support students in developing their knowledge and skills, fostering independence and self-directed learning, by actively implementing these scaffolding strategies.

Engaging the learner is one of the main advantages of scaffolding instruction. Students do not passively absorb the presented information; instead, they consolidate existing knowledge and acquire new knowledge through teacher prompting. Motivation plays a key role in enhancing students' engagement in class. In this vein, Mackiewicz and Thompson (2014) argue that "motivation influences and is influenced by students' interest in the tasks they are performing, their self-efficacy in successfully completing those tasks, and their ability to self-regulate their performances" (p. 63). Creating a supportive and encouraging environment for

students can boost their motivation by fostering positive teacher-student relationships. As a result, "motivational scaffolding" supports and motivates students through a variety of methods during the learning process. According to Mackiewicz and Thompson (2013), motivational scaffolding refers to the feedback tutors employ to establish rapport and solidarity with students, ensuring their active participation and sustained engagement in writing center conferences (p. 47). They identify five different types of motivational scaffolding related to politeness techniques, which are:

- Praise
  - Statements of encouragement or optimism about students' possibilities for success
  - Demonstrations of concern for students
  - Expressions of sympathy and empathy
  - Reinforcement of students' feelings of ownership and control
- (Mackiewicz and Thompson, 2013; p.47)

In their research on motivational scaffolding, Mackiewicz and Thompson (2013) argue that motivational scaffolding improves learning outcomes by increasing interest, self-efficacy, and self-regulation. Teachers can improve motivation and learning by providing feedback, setting attainable goals. However, individual motivation has an impact on its effectiveness.

Based on the study's background, the researcher intends to investigate the effect of motivational scaffolding techniques on students' writing performance and apprehension. Peer feedback and goal-setting techniques are expected to help improve writing skills while also reducing anxiety. The findings could help shape interventions and instructional methods.

The aim of this research is threefold. The first aim is to investigate how age and gender influence EFL students' writing apprehension. The second aim is to examine how motivational scaffolding affects the writing achievement of EFL students. Lastly, this study aims to investigate how motivational scaffolding influences the writing apprehension of EFL undergraduate students, contributing valuable insights into support strategies for this specific group. The objective is to introduce a writing intervention rooted in motivational scaffolding to effectively alleviate writing apprehension among EFL learners. The initial hypotheses of this study are:

- Writing apprehension is affected by age and gender
- Using motivational scaffolding with EFL undergraduate students reduces their writing apprehension

Based on the above hypotheses, the present study intends to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent do EFL undergraduate students experience writing apprehension?
- Does the EFL undergraduate students' age and gender have an effect on writing apprehension?
- To what extent does motivational scaffolding have an impact on the EFL students' written performance?
- To what extent does motivational scaffolding have an impact on the EFL students' writing apprehension?

## **2. Methodology**

This experimental study aimed to investigate the impact of age, gender, and motivational scaffolding on students' writing performance and writing apprehension. This study looked at

how age, gender, and motivational scaffolding influence student writing. The treatment group received motivational techniques, whereas the control group did not. The findings help educators and researchers improve writing performance and reduce apprehension.

## **2.1. Participants**

This study was conducted at the Institute of Business Administration in Sfax, Tunisia. All the participants are first-year Management students. The students were native Arabic speakers from various regions of Tunisia, spanning different age groups. A total of 60 students participated in the study (30 in the experimental group and 30 in the control group).

## **2.2. Instruments of Data Collection**

### **2.2.1. The Writing Apprehension Test**

To measure writing apprehension, the researcher opted to use the Daly-Miller (1975) Writing Apprehension Test. The 63-item test questionnaire subsequently decreased through factor analysis to 26 items on the Likert scale (strongly agree = 1, agree = 2, uncertain = 3, disagree = 4, strongly disagree = 5) that asked students to provide feedback on their experiences with apprehension in writing. The 26 items were divided into 13 positive polarity items and 13 negative polarity items. This test asks participants to indicate their agreements and disagreements with statements related to writing using a Likert scale.

To begin the analysis, each students' Writing Apprehension score was calculated using the formula: *Writing Apprehension = 78 + Positive Statement Values - Negative Statement Values*, as proposed by Daly and Miller (1975b). WAT total scores range from 26 to 130 points. A score of 26 to 59 indicates a high level of writing apprehension; a score of 60 to 96 indicates a moderate level of writing apprehension; and a score of 97 to 130 indicates a low level of writing apprehension.

### **2.2.2. The Pre-Post-Tests**

The most common research design is a pre- and post-test control group design. In this design, one or more training sessions may be given to the experimental group as a treatment. A pre- and post-test were administered to both the experimental and control groups. The post-test evaluates the immediate effects of the treatment, whereas the pre-test ensures that the groups are comparable prior to treatment. This design aids in determining the treatment's efficacy and identifying potential confounding variables.

### **2.2.3. Reliability of the Test**

To fulfill the objectives of this research, Daly-Miller's (1975) WAT was used. This test is based on a Likert scale that requires subjects to indicate whether they agree or not with specific sentences. The first set of studies by Daly and Miller (1975b) showed that the instrument's internal consistency was very high (.94). Later studies using this instrument consistently produced reliable scores.

### 3. Results

To answer the first research question, which aimed to investigate to what extent EFL undergraduate students experience writing apprehension, data collected from the Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) were fed into SPSS and then computed. The above mentioned formula, suggested by Daly and Miller (1975b), as well as the means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages were used to report the level of apprehension among the participants in this study. According to Table 1, the results of the study demonstrate that the mean and standard deviation for the writing apprehension level are  $M = 70.46$  and  $SD = 15.12$ , respectively. Table 1 summarizes the results of this question.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
WA	30	41,00	98,00	70,4667	15,12416
Valid N (listwise)	30				

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Of the 30 participants, nine (30%) experienced a high level of apprehension, 20 (66.7%) experienced a medium level of apprehension, and only one participant (3.3%) experienced a low level of writing apprehension. This indicates that the average writing apprehension level is moderate ( $M = 70.46$ ) among undergraduate students when writing in English.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 26 – 59	9	30,0	30,0	30,0
60 – 96	20	66,7	66,7	96,7
97-130	1	3,3	3,3	100,0
Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 2: Writing Apprehension Level

Mean scores ranging from 60 to 96 indicate a medium level of writing apprehension, which is not a critical level of writing apprehension, according to Daly and Miller (1975b). Although this level of writing anxiety is not harmful, it can still impact students, leading them to exhibit signs of anxiety when completing specific writing tasks. This proximity to Daly and Miller's high-level limit of writing apprehension (1975b) is significant because the mean score, 70.46, indicates a close approach to this threshold. Consequently, it is imperative for teachers to promptly address these signs of writing anxiety and provide the necessary support to prevent its escalation to more severe levels. Teachers can achieve this by implementing targeted interventions, such as individualized writing support, and cultivating a positive writing environment that encourages student confidence and creativity.

To identify the effects of age on the participants' writing apprehension, the students' responses were fed into SPSS version 20.0. Statistics were acquired using the Pearson correlation coefficient. Table 3 shows that the relationship between the two variables is not statistically significant since the p-value is greater than 0.05 ( $p = 0.098$ ).

		WA	Age
WA	Pearson Correlation	1	,098
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,605
	N	30	30
Age	Pearson Correlation	,098	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,605	
	N	30	30

Table 3: The Effect of Age on Writing Apprehension

The analysis of gender's effect on writing apprehension, similar to the results for age, revealed a statistically non-significant relationship between the two variables. The Chi-square and p-value analyses revealed a p-value of 0.940, which exceeds the designated alpha level of 0.05. In summary, the data indicates no association between the two variables.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	,123 <sup>a</sup>	2	,940
Likelihood Ratio	,223	2	,895
Linear-by-Linear Association	,055	1	,815
N of Valid Cases	30		

Table 4: The Effect of Gender on Writing Apprehension

To answer the third research question, an independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of the experimental and control groups. There was a significant difference in the scores of the experimental group (M = 3, 10; SD = 2.48) and the control group (M = 1, 86; SD = 1,736);  $t(58) = 2.2, p = .030$ . This indicates that the experimental intervention significantly influenced the outcome variable in comparison to the control group. Table 5 summarizes the results of the T-test.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper	
Difference	Equal variances assumed	2,376	,129	2,226	58	,030	1,23333	,55416	,12407	2,34260
	Equal variances not assumed			2,226	51,824	,030	1,23333	,55416	,12125	2,34542

Table 5: Independent Sample Test

Additionally, the effect size was calculated, and the results showed a medium effect ( $d = 0.57$ ). This suggests that the motivational scaffolding intervention may be a promising

strategy for further research and application because it shows that the treatment had a significant impact on the outcome measure.

As there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre- and post-test results after implementing motivational scaffolding, a multiple regression analysis with writing apprehension as the dependent variable and motivational scaffolding results as the independent variables was employed to examine the impact of the treatment on the students' writing apprehension. Table 6 shows that no significant regression equation was found ( $F(2, 27) = 0.66, p = .937$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .005. In other words, motivational scaffolding can account for only 0.05% of the variation in writing apprehension. In addition, the Durbin Watson value is 1.635, which is close to the value of 2, proving that the assumption of multiple regression is met. The findings imply that motivational scaffolding has little impact on writing anxiety. Moreover, the fulfillment of the multiple regression assumption suggests that the data analysis model was accurate.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	,070 <sup>a</sup>	,005	-,069	15,63640	,005	,066	2	27	,937	1,635

Table 6: Motivational Scaffolding As Criterion Variable

The unstandardized coefficients in Table 7 show that the two measures of motivational scaffolding are negatively correlated with writing apprehension. The coefficient column shows that the pre- and post-test results are not statistically significant. and the tolerance limit is .819 (which is less than 1). Therefore, the results indicate that multicollinearity does not exist. Consequently, there are no difficulties in clearly establishing a relationship between motivational scaffolding and writing apprehension.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	71,267	14,616		4,876	,000		
1 Pre test experimental	-,500	1,402	-,076	-,356	,724	,819	1,221
Post test experimental	,286	1,363	,044	,210	,836	,819	1,221

Table 7: Motivational Scaffolding Predictive Measures of Writing Apprehension

However, the negative correlation between motivational scaffolding and writing anxiety suggests that offering support and direction to students may help them feel less anxious about writing. Further research is crucial to explore the impact of motivational scaffolding on enhancing students' writing abilities. It is essential to consider other influencing factors that might affect the outcomes, which were not accounted for in this study.



#### 4. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate how motivational scaffolding instruction influences the writing apprehension of EFL undergraduate students. The study revealed that EFL undergraduate students exhibited a moderate level of writing apprehension. The findings of this study are consistent with those of other research studies, such as Kostić-Bobanović (2016) and Sundari & Febriyanti (2017). Their studies demonstrated that participants had a moderate level of writing apprehension. According to Sundari & Febriyanti (2017), their students did not feel pressured by the classroom environment regarding their writing process (p. 41). In contrast to the studies mentioned earlier, Rezaei and Jafari (2014) discovered contrasting outcomes in their research. Their studies indicated high levels of writing anxiety among Iranian EFL students. They claimed, “Such a high level of writing anxiety among English major students is concerning and reflects the inadequacy of our writing contexts and practices” (Rezaei and Jafari, 2014; p. 1549).

The second question dealt with the effect of age and gender on EFL undergraduate students’ writing apprehension. The findings of this study revealed that age had no significant effect on the participants’ writing apprehension, with 80% of participants reporting similar levels of apprehension regardless of age. The results are supported by Marshal and Varnon (2009), who found no evidence of significant differences between age and writing apprehension for native undergraduate students majoring in accounting. This finding aligns with the current study on EFL undergraduate students (cited in Qadir et al., 2021; p. 3). The same results were noted in McAllister’s (2014) study, which concluded that writing apprehension levels vary across different age groups, with younger participants exhibiting higher levels of apprehension compared to older participants. He claimed that nearly 70% of black undergraduate native English writers reported having moderate writing apprehension, 10.6% had low writing apprehension and 20.3% had high writing apprehension. Finally, the results of this study are consistent with Qadir et al.’s (2021) findings, which revealed that the relationship between age and writing apprehension is not significant. They argued, “Previous research on the effect of age on writing apprehension has not produced conclusive findings for two reasons. One reason concerns, as explained earlier, the limited number of studies that have considered age group differences in accounting for apprehension. The second reason is connected to the lack of justifications given by the studies showing significant differences between age and apprehension” (Qadir et al., 2021; p. 9). However, the results are inconsistent with Huwari and Abd Aziz’s (2011) study, which suggested that age could play a significant role in the writing apprehension of their EFL Jordanian postgraduate students, unlike the findings in this study on EFL undergraduate students. They concluded, “Age can affect a writer’s product. Usually, younger writers are more apprehensive than older ones due to a lack of experience.” (Huwari and Abd Aziz, 2011; p. 194).

The results of the variable gender showed analogous findings to age in writing apprehension. The statistical analysis showed no significant relationship between gender and writing apprehension. The results are in accordance with Kostić-Bobanović's (2016) longitudinal study, which revealed that gender did not account for writing apprehension in EFL Croatian undergraduate students. The Qadir et al. (2021) study exhibits comparable results. Their study demonstrated that gender, among other demographic variables, did not affect students’ writing apprehension. (Qadir et al., 2021; p. 11). However, contradicting findings regarding the effect of gender on EFL/ESL students' writing apprehension have been revealed in the literature. Several studies have shown that gender could have an impact on writing apprehension on the part of women, reporting that male participants experience a high level

of writing apprehension (McAllister, 2014). Nevertheless, Kostić-Bobanović (2016) stated that research on gender differences has produced conflicting results. Some studies confirmed that there are gender differences that favor one gender over the other, while others claimed that gender has no influence on writing apprehension (p. 12). Moreover, Qadir et al. (2021) argue that gender, as a factor, has produced more inconsistencies than other variables. One conclusion that can be drawn regarding gender is that it might differently predict the experience of English writing apprehension based on whether one's first language is English or not (p. 12).

The third and fourth research questions focused on exploring the effects of implementing motivational scaffolding on EFL undergraduate students' performance and writing apprehension. Statistical analyses, including an independent sample t-test and a multiple regression analysis, were performed, revealing significant gains in the experimental group following the implementation of motivational scaffolding instruction. Therefore, the utilization of motivational scaffolding directly contributed to the enhanced performance of EFL undergraduate students by providing the necessary support and guidance to maintain motivation during the learning process. This finding is supported by previous studies where motivational scaffolding was found to be effective for learning. Vonna et al. (2015) studied the effect of implementing scaffolding on students' writing achievements and concluded that the treatment could increase the participants' writing achievements when compared to the control group who received traditional instruction (p. 231). Similarly, Sohrabi et al. (2022) stated that learners' interaction with motivational scaffolding helped them improve their self-determination and learning achievements (p. 25).

The multiple regression analysis proved that there was no statistically significant effect between the mean scores of the experimental group and the writing apprehension results. Therefore, the treatment did not effectively reduce writing apprehension. The results are inconsistent with the study of Hwang (2022), which investigated the effects of scaffolding on writing apprehension in Korean engineering freshmen. According to Hwang (2022), "writing apprehension's reduction and self-expression improvement were significant in the supportive scaffolding group" (p. 33). She argued, "Writing apprehension's reduction and self-expression improvement were significant in the supportive scaffolding group" (Hwang, 2022, p. 33). This suggests that scaffolding techniques may be more effective at reducing writing anxiety than the treatment used in the current study.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study looked at how age, gender, and motivational scaffolding affected writing apprehension and achievement among EFL students. Age and gender had no significant effect on writing apprehension, according to statistical analysis. The Daly-Miller test showed no correlation between the variables. However, motivational scaffolding improved writing scores by 15%, demonstrating its positive impact. Future research could look into the long-term impact of scaffolding on writing proficiency, taking into account skill retention and transfer, as well as collecting qualitative data to gain a better understanding of participants' experiences.

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