# DO ANXIETY AND ENGLISH PROFICIENCY LEVEL AFFECT WRITING PERFORMANCE IN SECOND LANGUAGE (L2) LEARNING?

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**ABSTRACT.** *The present study shows a piece of research conducted to establish the degree of correlation between anxiety and English proficiency level of adolescents with writing performance in second language (L2) learning. For this purpose, we have developed a predictive-correlational study taking under consideration students from a high school of Granada (Spain). In our present study, we find that the English proficiency level predictor variable is more closely correlated with writing performance than anxiety. Although the anxiety variable has shown a negative correlation to writing performance, only the former English Proficiency Level has been included in the linear multiple regression model as the single and efficient predictor.*

*Keywords:* Writing performance in L2, anxiety, English proficiency level, adolescence.

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# ¿LA ANSIEDAD Y EL NIVEL DE COMPETENCIA EN INGLÉS AFECTAN AL APRENDIZAJE DE LA ESCRITURA DE LA SEGUNDA LENGUA (L2)?

**RESUMEN.** *El presente estudio muestra una investigación, cuyo objetivo es establecer qué grado de correlación se establece entre la ansiedad y el nivel de competencia en inglés con el aprendizaje de la escritura de la lengua inglesa en adolescentes. Para este fin, hemos implementado un estudio correlacional-predictivo tomando como objeto de estudio a estudiantes de un instituto de Granada (España). En nuestro estudio, hemos encontrado evidencias empíricas que concluyen que el nivel de competencia en inglés de los adolescentes está más correlacionado con el rendimiento escrito de la segunda lengua (L2) que con la ansiedad. Aunque la variable ansiedad muestra un correlación negativa con el aprendizaje de la escritura de la segunda lengua, sólo el nivel de competencia en inglés ha sido incluido en el modelo de regresión lineal múltiple desarrollado como el único y más importante predictor.*

*Palabras clave:* Rendimiento escrito en L2, ansiedad, nivel de competencia en inglés, adolescencia.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. ANXIETY IN SECOND LANGUAGE (L2) LEARNING

Since the 1960s, numerous researchers have suggested that anxiety interferes with second language learning. Studies identified anxiety as a factor associated with language learning that can be an obstacle for teachers and students (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986). Although there are many studies about the effects of anxiety on second language learning, the fact is that the lack of consistency in measures does not provide a clear view on this topic, as researchers have pointed out. Measures used are not specific to language learning. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) were the only researchers to limit their study to French students, and just a few of the studies referring to this topic focused on analyzing anxiety in language learning. Learners experienced palpitations, trembling, and difficulty concentrating, bringing as a result behavioural responses such as the avoidance of certain learning situations, such as missing classes (Akse, Hale, Engels, Raaijmakers and Meeu 2007; Woodrow 2011). Over time, different findings have demonstrated a positive correlation between anxiety and language learning with different measures such as test anxiety, facilitating-debilitating anxiety, etc. (Horwitz 2001). Learning a foreign language involves assessing learners' performance in the

classroom. Horwitz *et al.* (1986: 120) defined the anxiety associated with foreign language learning, which they termed Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process". It is assumed that speaking is not difficult because it is easy for people to understand each other; nonetheless, significant difficulties present themselves in second language learning. L2 learners often have a limited vocabulary, and this can sometimes be problematic by causing a lack of spontaneity, which makes learning a foreign language quite challenging to many.

As a consequence, students' anxiety is the result of the difficulties they encounter while learning a foreign language. Native speakers already possess an ability to use language which foreign language learners simply do not possess and may never fully acquire. This is challenging for learners, who must assimilate and implement techniques and strategies to properly use a second language (Horwitz 2001).

School is a complex period involving experiences, affectivity, as well as the use of social competencies and cognitive systems. Changes to specific areas such as the cognitive or affectivity system can lead to emotional disturbances which may affect the learning process (Bonifacci, Candria and Contento 2008; Zhang 2013).

## 1.2. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FOUR ESSENTIAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING SKILLS AND ANXIETY

Researchers have identified and examined four essential skills related to the study of foreign language learning: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Sparks, Patton, Ganschow and Humbach 2009). There is a correlation between these skills and anxiety which affects students' academic performance. Pae (2013) establishes correlations between the four essential foreign language learning skills and anxiety. Several studies have determined that there is a correlation between anxiety associated with foreign language listening and grades received in listening comprehension (Melanlioğlu 2013), and that there is a further correlation between general foreign language anxiety and final course grades. Learners also commonly exhibit apprehension with regards to the Speaking skill.These two skills differ between reading and writing. Reading is related to general anxiety, as Pae (2013) explains, because reading levels vary as a function of the target language. Horwitz (2001) considers that reading is a skill that provokes anxiety in foreign language learning, and is distinguishable from general anxiety. Thus, there are identifiable differences between learners according to their levels of reading proficiency in relation to anxiety. The correlation established between these skills concerns

how emotional disturbance could affect the development of anxiety (Bonifacci *et al.* 2008). These skills require the development of cognitive abilities suitable for understanding texts. For the foreign language learner engaged in reading and writing, the interaction of cognitive skills with emotional conditions (avoiding negative affectivity and disturbances which predispose learners to suffer anxiety) is a determinant factor (Bonifacci *et al.* 2008). Thus, in order to achieve success in the foreign language classroom, solid writing and reading abilities in the student's first language (L1) assure success: "superior writing ability combined with reading skills is an advantage in achieving academic success." (Bayliss and Raymond 2004: 43).

Although, as Pae (2013) has put forth, there is no data to support the relationship between writing and speaking, there are studies that do make this connection. Writing anxiety is generally associated with foreign language classes in which higher anxiety scores correlate to low self-concepts. This is a specific language skill, whereas speaking anxiety is associated with a more general type of anxiety. A student's level of anxiety varies according to the mode of communication employed; thus, there are students who suffer anxiety in a second language generally, whereas others experience anxiety in specific skills (Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert 1999; Cheng 2004).

Anxiety in a second language classroom can be caused by low self-confidence, manifesting itself in low self-esteem associated with writing and speaking (negative affectivity, fear of failure, or fear of evaluation). Negative self-perception of language competence plays an important role as a predictor of anxiety levels (Cheng *et al.* 1999). Writing and speaking are closely related and are obviously critical elements in developing command of a foreign language. Self-perception factors influence learners' expectations, affecting their foreign language classroom anxiety, and could even cause them to underestimate their ability to perform in the language they are learning (Cheng *et al.* 1999; Cheng 2002; Liu 2006; Pae 2013).

There are discrepancies in the relationships between the four skills and foreign language anxiety, as many researchers have shown (Horwitz *et al.* 1986; Cheng *et al.* 1999; Pae 2013); however, there are different factors which influence the development of anxiety related to each skill. The learning of each of the four skills is essential to gaining proficiency in the foreign language, and is directly linked to the development of prominent anxiety symptoms:

> Among others, the discrepancy between a learner's first and second language competence in different skill areas, a language learner has varied experiences in acquiring each of the four language skills, and his or her history of success and

failure in performing each skill might lead to differentiated attitudes, emotions, and expectations about each of the language skills. Language-skill-specific anxiety might well be one of the negative emotions and attitudes formed during the process of second language learning. (Cheng *et al.* 1999: 439).

## 1.3. ANXIETY AND WRITING SKILL

Writing skill is fundamental to the production of a foreign language. The content and grammatical complexity of writing assignments can affect the comprehension of texts, and can also affect other skills. Consequently, we focus on writing because "writing ability is the more important predictor of success" (Bayliss and Raymond 2004: 44). Language anxiety also influences writing skill. Horwitz (1986) notes that anxious students experience difficulty when writing a composition. They usually write short pieces whose quality is not as high as that of non-anxious students, who are more proficient in their compositional skills and express their opinions and ideas at a higher level.

Writing is a complex and difficult process "which requires visual memory, attention, phonological processing, semantic operations and motor performance" (Moretti, Torre, Antonello, Fabbro, Cazzo and Bora 2003: 215). This is a less specific skill in contrast to the others. At certain stages of development, such as during childhood and adolescence, cognitive resources are not fully developed; when combined with other possible disturbances that an adolescent might experience, this can lead to academic failure, as many scholars, including Bonifacci *et al.* (2008) and Grant (2013), have pointed out. Due to the fact that learning results from the interaction of specific cognitive skills and may be influenced by emotional conditions, affectivity can have a detrimental effect on a student's ability to retrieve and produce verbal information, as in the case of the development of reading skills.

Another factor that can influence writing anxiety as it relates to low learning achievement is self-esteem. Negative thoughts and feelings, reflected in anxiety symptoms, can affect the writing process and result in a student avoiding testing situations (Teksan 2012). Writing anxiety is linked to the fear of being evaluated and criticized. This skill requires the proper use of grammatical structures and rules, making learners feel dependent upon the opinions of teachers (Teksan 2012). Surprisingly, students' opinions of their compositions are usually higher than their academic results would suggest. There is no correlation between students' high expectations and their results, since their self-esteem is too high in this area, according to researchers who study the matter. In secondary education, learners are predisposed to suffer anxiety because at this stage they

are continuously evaluated; they feel pressure to produce good work, and in order to avoid receiving negative feedback, they might sometimes avoid these situations. The effect that anxiety has on students depends on their abilities, gender, etc., so writing ability is an important skill to students who are learning foreign languages (Teksan 2012). While most adolescents experience writing anxiety, they typically feel confident in their compositional abilities and are willing to write about any topic. But the fact is that students' academic results do not reflect this self-confidence: "…students are not afraid about not being understood for their writings, not avoiding critics about their writings… On the other hand, it can be asserted that almost half of the students feel writing anxiety, writing does not relax them…". (Teksan 2012: 489).

In the classroom, students are given specific writing assignments. Sometimes they do not clearly understand how to follow instructions in some contexts, resulting in apprehension that affects the quality of their writing over time, and ultimately, can influence various personal choices such as career selection. This apprehensiveness affects self-esteem; believing they might be unable to improve may cause them to avoid writing whenever possible. This takes place because, as Mascle (2013: 217) explains, apprehensive writers do not see writing as a process, and they feel they lack control over their ability to write. Conversely, those with high self-esteem are capable of improving their writing because low levels of anxiety are positive influences on these students (Teksan 2012: 493). The study carried out by Teksan (2012) presents gender differences related to writing anxiety. In this study concludes that, females experience more writing anxiety than, male students, and they act responsibly, conscientiously trying to avoid mistakes, whereas others studies conclude that males are more anxious than females because they do not receive rewards as female students do. Teksan (2012) notes that writing a diary increases students' anxiety, as they become more attentive to writing and attempt to avoid mistakes. We therefore conclude that writing anxiety is caused by adolescents' hypersensitivity to being assessed.

## 1.4. ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AFFECTS STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The proficiency level of English students is considered another factor affecting academic success, as scholars have noted. Two commonly tools used to measure English proficiency are the Quick Placement Test (QPT) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Many studies have assessed the implications of English proficiency on the scores students attain on these tests. Bayliss and Raymond (2004) have identified some problems with these measures, as have other researchers. Both the QPT and the TOEFL assess the overall proficiency level of

English learners with a single global score, but without providing individual scores for each of the four skills tested. According to the Bayliss and Raymond (2004) study, there is a strong correlation between students' English language proficiency and their academic performance, as observed by teachers in the classroom. According to Hubert's analysis (2013), learners' foreign language proficiency is a predictor of overall academic success. Participants in this study tended to improve their foreign language writing and speaking performance at similar rates long-term. Those learners whose language level was intermediate tended to be proficient and improve their results. Hence, one may conclude that those students who are proficient in foreign language classes usually produce better compositions (Hubert 2013). However, this does necessarily imply that they are proficient in speaking, because as Bayliss and Raymond (2004) point out, these tests do not provide an individual with an oral proficiency score. These researches show a correlation between English proficiency level and test results in writing or oral presentations. In this sense, it could be considered that this is another variable which affects students' performance in the foreign language classroom.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research is a correlational-predictive study. As Bickman and Rog (2009), Payne and Williams (2011) and Remler and Van Ryzin (2014) indicate, the main objective of such a study is to predict the behaviour of one or several dependent variables from the greater or lesser correlative effect of other independent or predictor variables.

### 2.1. VARIABLES OF THE STUDY

According to the typology developed we employ two types of variables:

a) Dependent or criterion variable: English writing performance.

b) Predictor or independent variable:

    b1. The level of anxiety in the English language class as measured by the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS).

    b2. The English proficiency level (QPT).

### 2.2. PARTICIPANTS

The number of volunteers who participated in this study was N = 71. For their selection, following Meltzoff (2000) and Trochim and Donnelly (2006), we used

a nonprobability sampling method (convenience sampling). Students who were subjects of the study were from a high school in Granada in Andalusia, Spain, in their second year of *Bachillerato* (the final two years of high school). Their specialized courses of study by subject matter were: 53% Natural Sciences and 47% Humanities and by gender: 55% male and 45% female.

## 2.3. DATA COLLECTION

To collect data we used two different measures (independent variables). First, to measure the level of anxiety in the English class we employed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) of Horwitz *et al.* (1986), consisting of a Likert scale with 33 items as follows: 5: Strongly Agree / 4: Agree/ 3: Neither Agree nor Disagree/ 2: Disagree /1:Strongly Disagree.

Second, to measure the level of pupils' proficiency level in English, we used results from the Quick Placement Test (QPT), versions 1 and 2. Although the standard QPT contains two parts, for purposes of this study, only Part One (questions 1–40) was used. Questions 1–10 contained three possible answers: A, B, or C, while the remaining questions had four possible answers: A, B, C, or D.

Finally, for the dependent variable we used a writing test. Pupils were assigned to write a composition entitled "Do all people have the same opportunities in our society? Why?"[1] The students were evaluated through a combination of teacher comments, our research team's classroom observations and evaluation of the students' compositions.

## 2.4. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

As parameters of quality in the measures used for the data collection we have considered validity and reliability criteria. To guarantee that these measures assert these criteria, we have used the FLCAS and QPT as sample standard measures. We have taken into account the consistency, precision, and reliability of measurement tools. We employed a measure of internal consistency to ensure scale reliability, implementing the most convenient coefficient, Cronbach's alpha, in its normal version for the FLCAS scale, and in its version for ordered polytomous items using SPSS software for the QPT test. The results of both coefficients were .82 for FLCAS and 0.77 for QPT. In both tests, the obtained reliability exceeded .75, which, according to Hogan (2004) and Muñiz (2003),

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[1] This essay subject was borrowed from a *Selectividad* (Spanish University Access Test) exam question.

is considered to be a reliability level between "high" and "very high." On the other hand, if each item of the scale is deleted individually, the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients give similar results. In any case, these values of Cronbach's alpha improve in comparison with the values obtained in both measures ($\alpha$= .82 for FLCAS and $\alpha$ = .77 for QPT). The fact is that there is not an essential item for the measure of these two constructs as a subject of study (English proficiency level and level of anxiety).

## 3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In order to analyse the collected data using the previously discussed measures, we employed SPSS v.22. Using this software, we conducted descriptive, inferential and multivariate analysis, which enabled us to achieve the goals of this paper.

### 3.1. DESCRIPTIVE AND INFERENTIAL ANALYSIS

We first present histograms with normal distribution (with mean and standard deviation) taken from results in the scores of students' writing test (0–10 points / standard average out of 5) and FLCAS (33–165 points / standard average out of 99) and the QPT (0–40 points / standard average out of 20).
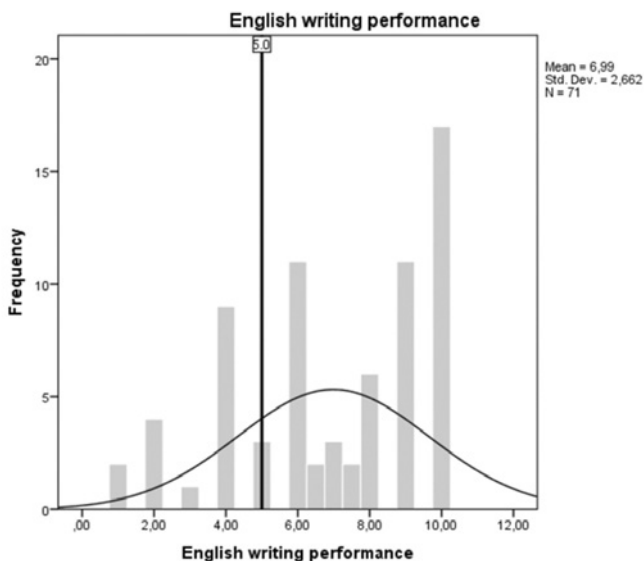


Figure 1. Histogram with normal distribution curve for English writing performance scores.
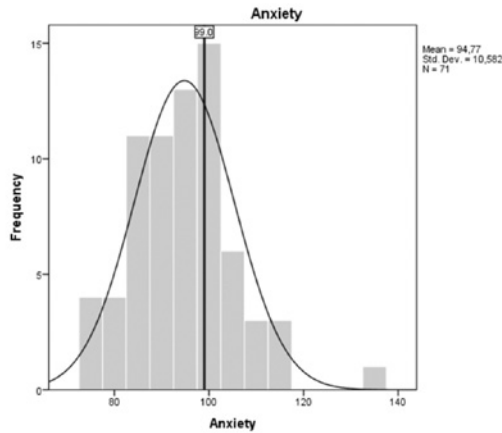
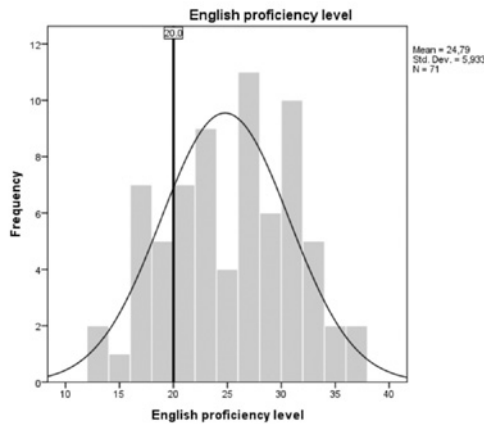Figure 2. Histogram with normal distribution curve for FLCAS anxiety scores.



Figure 3. Histogram with normal distribution curve for QPT English proficiency level scores.

By examining these charts, we observe that students have achieved high performance in English with a grade of about 7 (average = 6.99), almost 2 points higher than the average; the level of anxiety in the English language class is mid-low (average = 94.77), 5,23 points less than the average. Consequently, the English proficiency level of pupils can be considered to be lower intermediate (average 24.79); the Council of Europe would consider this to be midlevel, such as B1 or B2, depending on the pupil. Considering the two main variables identified (subject matter of *Bachillerato* and gender), descriptive results (sample group, mean, and standard deviation) have been obtained.

Table 1. Statistical description of the variables English Writing Performance, total scores of Anxiety in English language class (FLCAS), and the English Proficiency Level depending on the Subject Matter of the *Bachillerato*.

| Variable | Subject Matter | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| English Writing Performance | Natural Sciences | 38 | 7.44 | 2.80 |
| | Humanities | 33 | 6.45 | 2.41 |
| Anxiety (FLCAS) | Natural Sciences | 38 | 94.50 | 8.58 |
| | Humanities | 33 | 95.09 | 12.63 |
| Total English Proficiency Level | Natural Sciences | 38 | 26.24 | 6.02 |
| | Humanities | 33 | 23.12 | 5.45 |

Table 2. Statistical description of the variables English Writing Performance, total scores of Anxiety in English language class, and the English Proficiency Level depending on Gender.

| Variables | Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| English Writing Performance | Male | 39 | 6.42 | 2.87 |
| | Female | 32 | 7.67 | 2.22 |
| Anxiety (FLCAS) | Male | 39 | 94.54 | 10.77 |
| | Female | 32 | 95.06 | 10.50 |
| Total English Proficiency Level | Male | 39 | 24.72 | 6.47 |
| | Female | 32 | 24.88 | 5.29 |

What is significant in these two charts is that the Subject Matter of the *Bachillerato* that students chose scarcely influenced the mean in the two dependent, or criterion variables English Writing Performance and total Anxiety (FLCAS) scores), with a mean of 7.44 in Natural Sciences versus 6.45 in Humanities in English Writing Performance, and 90.50 in Natural Sciences and 95.09 in Humanities. However, there are more visible differences in the English Proficiency Level in the QPT. The average in the group of *Bachillerato* in Natural Sciences is about 26.24, in contrast to the Humanities *Bachillerato* of about 23.12. One can conclude that pupils of the Natural Sciences *Bachillerato* performed better on the English exams than the Humanities group, while the total Anxiety score results are reversed. In the case of Gender, the differences are not visible; moreover, the three dependent variables are considered. In all three cases, females have slightly better scores than

males. All the tests described applied the independent-samples Mann-Whitney U Test six different times, and it crossed *Bachillerato* and Gender predictor variables with the three considered dependent variables. From the results obtained we can deduce that the Subject Matter of *Bachillerato* and Gender variables have rarely produced statistically significant differences between the variables in English Writing Performance, Anxiety (FLCAS) in English class, and the English proficiency level, which are considered dependent variables. On one occasion, the independent-samples Mann-Whitney U test generated statistically significant differences (U=435; z=-2.21; $n_1$=33, $n_2$= 38; *p*<.05) in English Proficiency Level when it crosses with the variable Subject Matter of *Bachillerato*. In that sense, we can see that *Bachillerato* students of Natural Sciences, with a mean of 26.24, have displayed superior English language competence when compared to that of the Humanities *Bachillerato* students with an average of 23.12. Nevertheless, the main purpose of this study is to prove in what sense the variable of Anxiety (FLCAS) and English Proficiency Level can predict the performance in that language from the covariance or correlation that maintain those variables between them.

## 3.2. ANALYSIS OF MULTIPLE LINEAR REGRESSIONS

In order to attain our objective, we have implemented a multiple linear regression using the stepwise method. The main results after the calculation of this technique show that the inferred model has achieved the first and only step in the English class and also that the correlation between the dependent variable (English Writing Performance) and the only predictor variable (English Proficiency Level, because anxiety variable has been removed of the model with a correlation r =-0.319, *p*<.01) rises to r= 0.654, a moderate correlation, and is associated with an R Square coefficient of 0.428; this is a variance of about 48% or 42%, that is shared with both variables if we take R Square adjusted. Finally, we express the regression coefficient using the inferred multiple regression equation: $Y_{\text{English Writing Performance}}$ = -.291 + .294$_{\text{English Proficiency Level}}$ + ***b***$_{\text{Anxiety (FLCAS)}}$ *(removed)*. In this equation both parameters, as the constant "a" (*p*<.05) as the tangent "b" (*p*<.001), have obtained a levels of significance, which are statistically significant.

### 3.2.1. Assessment of adjustment of the inferred model

For the evaluation of this model, different criteria must be considered. Kahane (2008) and Meyers, Gamst and Guarino (2013) highlighted the following: the coefficient of determination ($R^2$), regression line adjustment, and the significance of the model measured by the analysis of variance (ANOVA). From the coefficient of determination, we note that it rises to 0.42, which confirms that the important

percentage is $S^2$ of the dependent variable (English Writing Performance) which is about 42%, explained by the predictor variable included in the model (English proficiency level). In showing adjustment of the model we suggest:
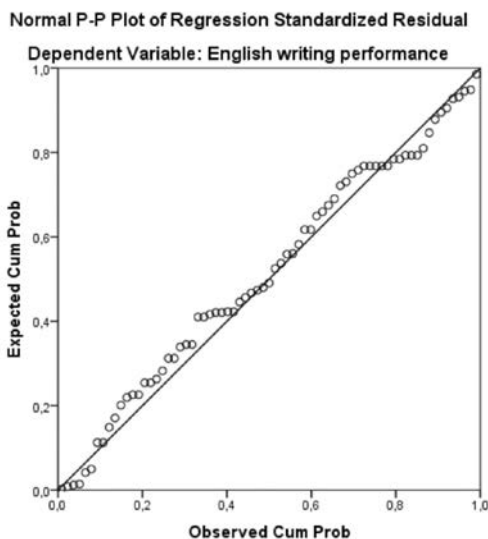


Figure 4. Normal P-P plot of regression standardized residual.

In Figure 4, we note -a more or less moderate variance between observed and expected values for the model due to the proximity of the value pairs to the regression line. Finally, we analyse whether just one predictor variable inserted in the model is relevant for the prediction of the dependent variable (statistical variance from zero, or not). To accomplish this, a subsequent ANOVA was computed:

Table 3. *ANOVA*

| Model | Resources of variation | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------|------------------------|----------------|----|-------------|---|------|
|       | Regression             | 212.331        | 1  | 212.331     | 51.650 | .000*** |
|       | Residual               | 283.655        | 69 | 4.111       |   |      |
| 1     | Total                  | 495.986        | 70 |             |   |      |

Predictors: (Constant), Total English Proficiency Level (QPT)
Dependent Variable English Writing Performance
*p< .05\* p<.01\*\* p<.001\*\*\**

Table 3 demonstrates that "F" value (51.65 for 1 and 70 degree freedom) is associated with $p<.001$ and we conclude that, the regression inferred model is statistically significant, that is, the explained variance (regression) is more significant than the unexplained variance (residual). This result is relevant as applied to the predictive goals sought in this research study.

## 4. DISCUSSION

There are relevant conclusions that may be drawn from this study. First the levels of anxiety in English class (FLCAS) are not sufficiently relevant to predict whether anxiety interferes in students' writing performance. The fact is that there is a statistically significant negative correlation between anxiety levels and English writing performance (r = -0.319; $p<.01$), although this association is not strong enough to establish a predictive model.

Nonetheless, students' knowledge of English certainly affects writing performance. These results show a positive and statistically significant correlation (r=0.654; $p<.01$) as part of the lineal multiple regression inferred model. That is, we can affirm that the main discovery in this analysis is that English proficiency level, rather than anxiety, affects writing performance in English class, and is necessary for predicting students' results in this area. Hence, it must be emphasized that the inferred model has shown to be valid for predicting the dependent variable of English writing performance. These results support the conclusions established by some scholars such as Bayliss and Raymond (2004), Matsuda and Gobel (2004) and Hubert (2013) that connect pupils' language proficiency to writing performance. Over long-term periods, students improved their compositions and produced high quality, error-free writings.

In the second year of *Bachillerato*, learners must be proficient enough to pass required exams. At this stage of their education, the *Boletín Oficial del Estado* (BOE) (Official State Gazette) has established that students must be evaluated on their ability to write clear and detailed texts in a foreign language, utilize proper grammar and syntax, and apply cohesion and coherence at an appropriate register. These criteria have been applied by instructors and the research team in assessing student compositions, the dependent variable. Recent studies have shown that anxiety is a variable which interferes with the learning of English and affects writing performance. There are several variables which can influence the development of anxiety in English class, and thereby affect writing skills. Although the present study does not show a conclusive result in correlating anxiety to writing performance, there is evidence provided by other studies which supports our hypothesis (Horwitz *et al.* 1986; Cheng *et al.* 1999; Horwitz 2001; Stephenson 2006; Teksan 2012; Dordinejad and Ahmadabad 2014). What Teksan (2012) suggests in his study is that

variables such as gender, status, or ability influence the development of anxiety, most especially in composition students who tend to feel confident in writing about any topic. Their self-confidence is usually higher in writing than in other skills, such as speaking, where levels of apprehension are higher (Stephenson 2006; Teksan 2012). Volunteers participating in these studies have shown that they are proficient in the correct use of the written foreign language.

We chose to use previous knowledge of the foreign language (English) as a predictor variable because at this stage it is presumed that these students are proficient and precise in their command of the foreign language as BOE has established. The second year of *Bachillerato* is the culmination of pre-university studies, in which students have developed techniques and strategies to be autonomous and efficient in their continuous learning, and are finally able to express themselves properly in English. Therefore, this study has shown that this variable—English Proficiency Level, as measured by the QPT—influences students' writing performance, at a time when their confidence is higher when faced with writing a composition (Teksan 2012). This result coincides with Teksan when he asserts that those learners who are self-confident can improve their results and influence positively in their grades and compositions, as this present study has shown. Some researchers such as Horwitz (2001) have devised methods for measuring writing anxiety, such as through the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which takes into account the quality and quantity of compositions written by students. Conversely, the results of the present study are not conclusive to establish that these participants do not suffer writing anxiety; however, our results suggest that these participants tend to be less anxious in written English (Teksan 2012) and they might experience low levels of anxiety in other skills (Horwitz *et al*. 1986; Horwitz 2001; etc.).

Finally, there is little evidence to support a correlation between gender and anxiety, despite the data showing subtle differences between males and females. Prior studies have indeed uncovered evidence showing that females experience more anxiety than males do. Teksan (2012) has established such a connection between females and writing anxiety which suggests that females act more responsibly than males do, and take greater care in avoiding writing mistakes, which improves their academic performance. However, males usually have more positive opinions about their own writing abilities and performance than females, although there is other research presented in Teksan's study that disagrees with these results. The other predictor variable, subject matter studied in *Bachillerato*, did not produced significant results when compared to anxiety (FLCAS). When it was compared to English proficiency level, however, the Natural Sciences *Bachillerato* obtained an English Writing Performance score that was significantly

higher than the scores obtained by the Humanities *Bachillerato* students. In one case, when the variables "subject matter studied in the *Bachillerato*" and "English proficiency level" have been analyzed in the regression model, the Natural Sciences *Bachillerato* obtained an English Writing Performance score that was higher than the scores obtained by the Humanities *Bachillerato* students.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This study was undertaken to establish possible correlations between anxiety and English writing performance on the part of *Bachillerato* students. Although we did not establish a statistically significant correlation between anxiety and writing performance, we did establish a positive correlation between English proficiency level and writing performance. Throughout adolescence, teenagers experience many events which interfere in their academic performance, as many scholars have pointed out. This difficult stage in their lives predisposes them to suffer future mental disorders, such as anxiety, which can be reflected in academic results. Factors that have been shown to reduce anxiety experienced in foreign language class include exposure to a nurturing classroom environment, as well as positive peer and family relationships.

All of the educators involved in a teenager's education must be engaged in the learning process in order to ensure academic success. Late adolescence is a transitional period to adulthood in which new feelings and senses flourish. The second year of *Bachillerato* involves a transition to a new stage of development where the student must put into practice the techniques, strategies, and abilities developed during the secondary school years. Such students are a step away from entering the university where they will confront academic writing challenges and research projects that will need to be understood and properly communicated in writing. As Teksan (2012) explains, participants who displayed low levels of anxiety during the period of study could suffer less anxiety in future writing tests.

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