Full Length Research Paper

The study on the writing anxiety levels of primary school 6, 7 and 8th year students in terms of several variables

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The purpose of this study is to examine the writing anxiety levels of primary school 6, 7 and 8th year students in terms of several variables using the "writing anxiety scale" developed by Yaman (2010). The study group is composed of 1407 students enrolled at the 6, 7 and 8th years of 10 primary schools in Şarkişla district of Sivas province. The higher scores obtained from the "writing anxiety scale" are interpreted as the writing anxiety levels of the students in their native language are lower. According to this, it is determined that the writing anxiety levels of the students significantly differ in terms of their gender, their status of enjoying Turkish language courses, the number of the books they have read in the last month and the status of their keeping diaries.

Key words: Native language, writing, anxiety, writing anxiety.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, anxiety has been of interest - among the other active variables - in the fields of language acquisition and learning (Kurt and Atay, 2007: 13). Literature review and the interviews with the teachers revealed that "empathy, motivation, expression, being evaluated by the others, organization, delaying, self-respect, technical skills and writing anxiety" were influential in the development of writing skill (Petzel and Wenzel, 1993: 3). Writing anxiety is a structure related to perspective or avoidance tendency of an individual towards the situations which require writings to be evaluated (Daly, 1978: 10). According to Faigley et al. (1981: 2), the individuals with higher levels of writing anxiety considered writing not as a rewarding but as a punishment. The ones with high levels of anxiety prefer professions and academic fields which they think do not require writing. This anxiety reflects on their behaviors while writing, their attitudes that they express in their own writings and their writings. On the other hand, the ones

with lower levels of writing anxiety do not avoid of the situations that require writing; they rely on their writing skills; and they mostly enjoy writing. Writing anxiety can start at early ages and may become a lifelong problem (Wiltse, 2001: 2). Writing anxiety also affects the writing performance. Faigley et al. (1981: 10) found that the writings of the students with high level of writing anxiety were distinctively shorter, incomplete in terms of syntax and less fluent than the others. According to Veit (1980: 4), anxiety is not a friend of the writer. Students may learn better and teacher can teach better in classes in which the anxiety is lowered to the minimum. The primary school years in which the language skills and, thereby, the writing skills of the students are developed are quite important in developing attitudes towards writing (Akkaya and Susar, 2010: 4745).

The determination of the factors causing writing anxiety and the attempts to remove these will contribute to the students to develop positive attitudes towards writing.

Table 1. The demographic distribution of the study group.

Grade		Gender		Total
		Girl	Boy	
6th grade	n	199	237	436
	%	45.6	54.4	100
7th grade	n	238	263	501
	%	47.5	52.5	100
8th grade	n	233	237	470
	%	49.6	50.4	100
Total	n	670	737	1407
	%	47.6	52.4	100

Therefore, this study which aims at examining the writing anxiety levels of the primary school 6th, 7th and 8th year students in terms of several variables is important as it indicates the current situation and sheds the light on further studies on developing writing skills.

The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the writing anxiety levels of primary school 6, 7 and 8th year students in terms of several variables. The following questions were asked for this purpose:

1) Do the writing anxiety levels of the primary school 6, 7 and 8th year students differ according to their genders?
2) Do the writing anxiety levels of the primary school 6, 7 and 8th year students differ according to their status of enjoying Turkish language courses?
3) Do the writing anxiety levels of the primary school 6, 7 and 8th year students differ according to their number of books they read in the last month?
4) Do the writing anxiety levels of the primary school 6, 7 and 8th year students differ according to their status of keeping diaries?

METHODS

This study was constructed in the survey model. According to Karasar (1999: 77), survey model aims at "describing the previous or current situation as it was or as it is". This study is limited with the data obtained from the scale applied to 1407 students who were enrolled at the 6, 7 and 8th year students at all primary schools in Şarkişla district of Sivas province and present on the day of application. In the study, the process was planned after reviewing the literature related to the writing acquisition and writing anxiety.

As for the data collection, the scale that was developed by Yaman (2010) was used with permission in the study. The formal application was made to and the required permission was obtained from the Şarkişla Provincial Ministry of National Education in order to apply the survey. After that, the schools were visited one by one and the scale forms were delivered to guidance counselors and they were informed about the application of the scale. The time allocated to answer the questions was between 8 to 10 min. The scale forms were collected after they were answered by the students; the scales were given numbers and they were imported to the computer for the analysis. The study was finalized with the analysis of the data imported to the computer.

Study group

The study group was composed of the 6, 7 and 8th year students at 10 primary schools students in Şarkişla district of Sivas province in the "fall term" of 2010 to 2011 educational year (Anafartalar Primary School: 101 students, Kahraman Köseoğlu Primary School: 86 students, Âşik Veysel Primary School: 95 students, Şehit Tuncer Çeliker Boarding Primary School: 287 students, Abdüllatif Şener Primary School: 171 students, Atatürk Primary School: 184 students, Millî Egemenlik Primary School: 197 students, Mehmet Emin Tuna Primary School: 84 students, Cumhuriyet Primary School: 115 students, Hürriyet Primary School: 87 students). A child has to be at least 72 months old in order to start the compulsory education in Turkey. Thus, the study group was composed of the students between 12 to 15 years old. The distribution of the students according to their gender and grade levels is presented in Table 1. The study group of the study was composed of 1407 students in total. Of these, 436 of them were 6th year students, 501 of them were 7th year students and 470 of them were 8th grade students; and 670 of them were females and 737 of them were males.

Data collection tool

"Writing anxiety scale" is an assessment tool that was developed by Yaman (2010) in order to determine the writing anxiety levels of the

Table 2. The results of factor analysis related to the writing anxiety scale.

Item No.	Factor covariance	Factor 1 loading	Factor loadings after rotation			Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha level
			Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3		
I2	0.281			0.527		0.198	
I7	0.328			0.556		0.272	
I12	0.418			0.646		0.277	
I13	0.358			0.576		0.342	0.697
I14	0.395			0.612		0.334	
I16	0.437			0.657		0.324	
I17	0.336			0.575		0.191	
I4	0.556	0.683			0.642	0.485	
I5	0.374				0.594	0.325	
I6	0.593	0.571			0.762	0.418	0.741
I8	0.483	0.661			0.592	0.503	
I15	0.545	0.549			0.732	0.387	
I3	0.648	0.660	0.782			0.442	
I11	0.725	0.689	0.836			0.478	0.801
I18	0.443	0.605	0.613			0.414	
I19	0.680	0.657	0.814			0.460	

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the whole scale was calculated as 0.771.

Turkish students at the second level of the primary school. The scale that was composed of 19 items was a 5-point Likert type scale. The items with negative meanings were reverse-coded. The higher scores obtained from the "writing anxiety scale" are interpreted as the writing anxiety levels of the students in their native language are lower. If the score obtained by dividing the total score by the item number is below 2.5, it indicates high level of writing anxiety; if it is between 2.5 and 3.5, it indicates medium level of writing anxiety; and if it is 3.5 and over, it indicates low level of writing anxiety.

The findings related to the validity of the scale

KMO and Barlett tests were done in order to see whether the "writing anxiety scale" was appropriate for the exploratory factor analysis. In this context, the result of KMO test was to be 0.60 or higher and the Barlett test of sphericity was to be statistically significant (Jeong, 2004). At the end of this study, KMO test result was found to be 0.836; Barlett test of sphericity was statistically significant (P<0.01); and it was concluded that the exploratory factor analysis could be applied for the scale. In the exploratory factor analysis, the boundary value for the task values in the factor where the items take part is accepted as 0.50. Varimax technique, one of the orthogonal rotations, together with the component analysis method is used to find out the factors whose items give high relation to themselves and to be able to interpret the factors more easily. The findings related to the exploratory factor analysis of the "writing anxiety scale" are presented in Table 2. Three factors were obtained at the end of the factor analysis applied to the "writing anxiety scale". The first factor explained the 16.61% the

second factor explained the 15.70% and the third factor explained the 15.20% of the total variance. The sum of the factor dimensions of the scale explained 47.51% of the scale. After the factor-turning, 3 items (1, 9 and 10) of the scale were dropped from the scale as they were below the 0.50 boundary value. It was seen that the first factor was consisted of 4 items, the second factor was consisted of 7 items and the third factor was consisted of 5 items.

The load values of the items in the first factor ranged from 0.613 to 0.836; the load values of the items in the second factor ranged from 0.527 to 0.657; and, the load values of the items in the third factor ranged from 0.592 to 0.62. According to the obtained result, it could be claimed that the scale was valid.

The findings related to the reliability of the scale

The Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to find the reliability of the scale; and 0.771 for the whole scale, 0.801 in the first sub-dimension, 0.697 in the second dimension and 0.741 in the third dimension were attained. Tezbaşaran (1997: 47) stated that the reliability coefficient should be close to 1 as much as possible so that a Likert type scale is accepted as adequate. Based on these results, the scale could be stated to be reliable.

Data analysis

Before the data analysis, the surveys were given numbers. The data analysis was carried out with 1407 scales. The items with negative meanings were reverse-coded in the scale. In the data analysis, students got "strongly disagree" 1, "disagree" 2, "neither

Table 3. The results of independent *t*-test that indicate the differences of the students' writing anxiety levels according to the Gender.

Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	S.D	t-value	p-value
Girl	670	3.65	0.66	8.779	0.000*
Boy	737	3.36	0.61		

*P<0.05.

Table 4. The results of independent *t*-test that indicate the differences of the students' writing anxiety levels according to their status of enjoying Turkish language courses.

Status	N	$\bar{x}$	S.D	t-value	p-value
Like	1286	3.5306	0.64	6.393	0.000*
Dislike	121	3.1410	0.64		

*P<0.05.

agree nor disagree" 3, "agree" 4, and "strongly agree" 5 points in order to calculate their responses. The lowest score to be obtained in the scale was 16 and the highest score was 80. At the end of the analysis, the findings for the problem statement were interpreted based on the intervals of 1.00 to 1.79; "strongly disagree", 1.80 to 2.59, disagree, 2.60 to 3.39 neither agree nor disagree, 3.40 to 4.19 agree, and 4.20 to 5.00 strongly agree. The findings related to the sub-problems were analyzed by means of independent sample *t*-test and one-way ANOVA.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings related to the first research question (do the writing anxiety levels of the primary school 6, 7 and 8th year students differ according to their genders?) of the study were presented in Table 3. According to the Table 3, the writing anxiety levels of the students significantly differed according to gender ($t_{(1405)}$ = 8.779, p<0.05). When the mean scores were examined, it could be seen that the difference was in favor of the female students. The findings of the several studies showed that the writing anxiety levels of the female students were lower than the male students (Pajares and Valiante, 1997), they had more positive attitudes towards writing (Graham et al., 2007; İşeri, 2010) and they enjoyed writing more (Clark and Dugdale, 2009). Zorbaz (2010: 197) also found that there was significant difference between the female students and male students in terms of enjoying writing, having prejudices towards writing, anxiety for being assessed and the level of sharing their writings in favor of the female students. According to this, it can be stated that the findings of this study and the findings of

the aforementioned studies support each other. The findings related to the second research question (do the writing anxiety levels of the primary school 6, 7 and 8th year students differ according to their status of enjoying Turkish language courses?) of the study were presented in Table 4.

When Table 4 was examined, the writing anxiety levels of the students differed significantly ($t_{(1405)}$ = 6.393, p<0.05) according to their status of enjoying Turkish language courses and the difference was in favor of the ones enjoying Turkish language courses according to the mean scores. Yaman (2010) also found that the writing anxiety levels of the students who did not enjoy Turkish language courses were higher than the ones enjoying Turkish language courses. The findings of this study are in parallel with the findings of the mentioned study. The findings related to the third research question (do the writing anxiety levels of the primary school 6, 7 and 8th year students differ according to their number of books they read in the last month?) of the study were presented in Table 5. According to Table 5, the writing anxiety levels of the students differed significantly ($F_{(4-1402)}$ = 31.629, p<0.05) in terms of the number of books they read in the last month. Scheffe test was done in order to find the source of the difference. The data related to the Scheffe test were presented in Table 6. When Table 6 was examined, it was seen that there was a difference between the ones who never read a book and the ones who read 6 or more books against the one who never read; between the ones who read 1 to 2 books and the ones who read 3 to 4, 5 to 6 and 6 and more against the ones who read 1 to 2 books; between the ones who read

Table 5. The results of one-way ANOVA that indicate the differences of the students' writing anxiety levels according to the number of books they read in the last month.

Group	Sum of squares	Df.	Mean square	F-value	p-value
Between groups	49.143	4	12.286		
Within groups	544.579	1402	0.388	31.629	0.000*
Total	593.722	1406			

*P<.0.05.

Table 6. The result of scheffe test done in order to determine the source of the difference.

(I) The book read	(J) The book read	The average difference (I - J)	p-value
Never	1-2	-0.05042	0.995
	3-4	-0.24570	0.282
	5-6	-0.34104	0.054
	6 and more	-0.58328(*)	0.000
1-2	Never	0.05042	0.995
	3-4	-0.19528(*)	0.001
	5-6	-0.29062(*)	0.000
	6 and more	-0.53286(*)	0.000
3-4	Never	0.24570	0.282
	1-2	0.19528(*)	0.001
	5-6	-0.09534	0.396
	6 and more	-0.33758(*)	0.000
5-6	Never	0.34104	0.054
	1-2	0.29062(*)	0.000
	3-4	0.09534	0.396
	6 and more	-0.24224(*)	0.000
6 and more	Never	0.58328(*)	0.000
	1-2	0.53286(*)	0.000
	3-4	0.33758(*)	0.000
	5-6	0.24224(*)	0.000

3 to 4 books and the ones who read 6 and more books against the ones who read 3 to 4 books; between the ones who read 5 to 6 books and the ones who read 6 or more books against the ones who read 5 to 6 books. The finding indicated that the more books they read, the lower level of anxiety they had. Yilmaz (2008) and Zorbaz (2010) found that the students who followed periodicals were more successful in writing. Wiltse (2001: 2) also stated that the writing anxiety was more common among the poor writers than the competent writers. According to this, it can be claimed that reading books increases the achievement in writing and, thereby, lowers the writing anxiety. As a matter of fact, Yaman (2010) found that the students who read no books had more writing anxiety than the ones who read 3 to 4 books a month.

The findings related to the fourth research question (do the writing anxiety levels of the primary school 6, 7 and 8th year students differ according to their status of

Table 7. The results of independent *t*-test that indicate the differences of the students' writing anxiety levels according to their status of keeping diaries.

Diary	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	t-value	p-value
I keep	510	3.69	0.64	8.565	0.000*
I do not keep	897	3.39	0.63		

*P<.0.05.

keeping diaries?) of the study were presented in Table 7. According to Table 7, the writing anxiety levels of the students differed significantly ($t_{(1405)}$ = 8.565, p<0.05) in terms of their status of keeping diaries. When the mean scores were examined, it could be seen that the difference was in favor of the ones keeping diaries. Students feel that they could write better as they practice. Students' feeling that they are writing better lowers their writing anxiety levels (Öztürk and Çeçen, 2007: 229). Additional writing exercises with positive content provide the anxious writers with opportunities to ease their fears and cope with their worries (Walsh, 1986: 5). When it is considered that keeping diaries provides students with opportunities to practice and exercise with positive content, it can be stated that the findings of this study support these views.

Conclusion

The writing anxiety levels of the 6, 7 and 8th year students at primary schools were examined in this study and it was found that the female students against male students, the ones keeping diaries against the ones who did not, the students enjoying Turkish language courses against the ones who did not have lower anxiety levels; and the higher the number of books they read, the lower writing anxiety level they had. Based on these findings, similar studies might be carried out with different study groups; new arrangements at school activities and programs might be made for decreasing writing anxiety levels after comparing the findings.

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