

“Shadows of the Hidden Dragon”; A Case Study of ESL Writing Anxiety at the Tertiary Level

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Studies related to English as a second language which are taken place in the Sri Lankan tertiary education context show that, out of four language skills among the undergraduates, the weakest skill is writing. Second language writing is strategically, rhetorically and linguistically different from first language writing because specifically at the tertiary level, students have different writing experiences, different aptitudes and different motivation levels in second language writing. Varying metacognitive knowledge in first language and second language, different experiences in using the first language and the second language and different individual characteristics affect writing skills in a second language. However, since the medium of instruction and medium of assessment at the tertiary level of the Sri Lankan context, is in English, writing in English becomes a decisive factor. Hence, the aim of the present study is to determine the extent of writing anxiety in English and to find out the underlying causes for writing anxiety. As the method of data collection, questionnaires adopted from Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) (Cheng, 2004), Second Language Writing Anxiety Reasons Scale (SLWARS) (Kara, 2013) were utilized among 90 first year undergraduates representing approximately 30 each from three different degree programmes, at the University of Vocational Technology. The study reveals that the majority of the students, irrespective of the nature of the degree programme that they follow, experience high or average level of writing anxiety towards writing tasks in academic purposes.

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