

## Students' emotional experiences in writing English essays: A thematic narrative analysis

Harnita Rosalia\* and Andi Nurul Annisa Budiman

English Department, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, **Indonesia**

\*Corresponding Author: [harnita.rosalia@unm.ac.id](mailto:harnita.rosalia@unm.ac.id)

*Received:* 26 February 2026; *Revised:* 27 April 2026; *Accepted:* 09 May 2026

<https://doi.org/10.58712/se.v2i2.142>

**Abstract:** This study explores students' emotional experiences during the process of writing English essays in an EFL context. The study investigates the emotions students encounter, how these emotions influence their writing engagement and performance, and how students construct meaning from their emotional experiences. This qualitative study employed thematic narrative analysis involving five undergraduate students from the English Department at Universitas Negeri Makassar, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and four-week reflective journals and analyzed by identifying recurring emotional themes while preserving participants' narrative experiences and reflections. The findings reveal that students experienced anxiety, self-doubt, motivation, relief, and emotional responses to feedback throughout different stages of writing. These emotions significantly influenced students' confidence, engagement, and writing performance. The study further found that emotional experiences operated as an interconnected emotional system in which anxiety, confidence, motivation, and feedback responses continuously influenced one another throughout the writing process. In addition, students interpreted anxiety as evidence of linguistic limitations while perceiving improvement and supportive feedback as sources of confidence and motivation. This study contributes to EFL writing research by highlighting the dynamic and interconnected nature of emotional experiences and demonstrating the value of thematic narrative analysis in exploring students' emotional journeys and meaning-making processes in EFL writing contexts.

**Keywords:** EFL learners; EFL writing; L2 writing; thematic narrative analysis; writing emotions

### 1. Introduction

Writing in a second or foreign language is widely recognized as a complex and multidimensional process that involves not only linguistic competence but also cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), students are required to generate ideas, organize arguments, and express them in grammatically accurate and coherent forms. These demands often make writing a challenging task, particularly for learners who are still developing their language proficiency.

Beyond its cognitive complexity, writing is also shaped by learners' emotional experiences. Students frequently encounter feelings such as anxiety, fear, frustration, and motivation during the writing process. According to [Krashen \(1982\)](#), affective variables such as anxiety and self-confidence can influence language acquisition by facilitating or hindering learners' performance. When emotional barriers are high, learners may struggle to express their ideas effectively despite having adequate knowledge. One of the most widely discussed emotional factors in L2 writing is writing anxiety. [Daly \(1978\)](#) introduced the concept of writing apprehension, referring to individuals' tendency to avoid

writing due to fear of evaluation. In EFL contexts, this anxiety is often associated with limited vocabulary, grammatical difficulties, and concerns about making errors, which can affect students' confidence and willingness to engage in writing tasks.

Recent studies continue to confirm the significant role of writing anxiety in shaping students' experiences. For example, [Putra et al. \(2024\)](#) found that EFL learners often experience moderate to high levels of writing anxiety due to time pressure, fear of evaluation, and limited proficiency. The study also revealed that students with lower language proficiency tend to experience higher levels of anxiety, suggesting a close relationship between linguistic competence and emotional responses in writing. In addition to anxiety, the role of feedback has been highlighted as an important factor influencing students' emotional experiences. [Razmi & Ghane \(2024\)](#) demonstrated that written corrective feedback not only improves students' writing performance but also reduces anxiety and enhances self-efficacy. This finding indicates that emotional responses in writing are dynamic and can be shaped through appropriate pedagogical support. Furthermore, emotional variables such as self-efficacy and motivation have been shown to play a mediating role in writing performance. [An & Li \(2024\)](#) found that writing anxiety negatively affects learning outcomes, while self-efficacy helps mitigate its impact. Similarly, [Arfiandhani & Takeuchi \(2025\)](#); [Zhang & Jing. \(2026\)](#) reported that writing self-efficacy significantly contributes to students' writing quality and interacts with other individual factors such as motivation and perseverance.

These studies suggest that emotional experiences in L2 writing are complex and influenced by multiple interacting factors, including individual beliefs, instructional practices, and contextual conditions. Consequently, limited attention has been given to how emotional experiences evolve across stages of writing and how students personally interpret and construct meaning from those experiences. Emotional experiences in EFL writing are often dynamic, interconnected, and contextually shaped, requiring approaches that can capture students' lived experiences and emotional trajectories. To address this gap, this study employs thematic narrative analysis to explore students' emotional experiences in writing English essays in an Indonesian EFL context. By examining students' narratives and reflective journals, the study seeks to understand how emotional experiences develop throughout the writing process, influence engagement and performance, and are interpreted by learners themselves.

This study contributes to EFL writing research in three ways. First, it provides a deeper understanding of emotional experiences as dynamic and interconnected processes rather than isolated emotional variables. Second, it highlights how emotions evolve across stages of essay writing. Third, it demonstrates the value of thematic narrative analysis in exploring emotional meaning-making in EFL writing contexts. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What emotional experiences do students encounter during the process of writing English essays?
2. How do emotional experiences influence students' writing engagement and performance throughout the writing process?
3. How do students interpret and construct meaning from their emotional experiences in English essay writing?

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Emotional dimensions in L2 writing**

Second language (L2) writing is increasingly understood as a multidimensional process that involves not only cognitive and linguistic skills but also emotional and affective factors. While early models such as [Flower & Hayes \(1981\)](#) emphasize cognitive processes, more recent perspectives highlight the

significant role of emotions in shaping students' engagement and writing performance. One of the most influential frameworks for understanding the role of emotions in language learning is the Affective Filter Hypothesis proposed by [Krashen \(1982\)](#). This theory posits that emotional variables such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence can either facilitate or hinder language acquisition. When learners experience high levels of anxiety or low confidence, their affective filter becomes elevated, limiting their ability to process and produce language effectively. In the context of writing, this may result in hesitation, avoidance, or difficulty in expressing ideas.

Among various emotional factors, writing anxiety has received considerable scholarly attention. [Daly \(1978\)](#) introduced the concept of writing apprehension, referring to individuals' tendency to avoid writing due to fear of evaluation. In EFL contexts, this anxiety is often associated with linguistic limitations, including restricted vocabulary and grammatical uncertainty. Research by [Cheng \(2004\)](#) further identifies multiple dimensions of writing anxiety, including cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behaviour. In addition to anxiety, students' belief in their own capabilities plays a crucial role in shaping their writing experiences. [Bandura \(1997\)](#) conceptualizes self-efficacy as individuals' belief in their ability to perform specific tasks. In writing contexts, students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to engage actively, persist in the face of difficulties, and produce higher-quality texts ([Pajares, 2003](#)). Conversely, low self-efficacy may lead to hesitation, task avoidance, and reduced performance. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that emotional experiences in writing are not isolated factors but are closely interconnected. Anxiety may lower students' confidence, while strong self-efficacy may help mitigate negative emotional states. Therefore, understanding L2 writing requires an integrated perspective that considers both affective barriers and students' beliefs about their capabilities.

## 2.2 Motivation and feedback as mediating factors

Beyond anxiety and self-efficacy, other emotional variables such as motivation and feedback also play important roles in shaping students' writing experiences. According to [Deci & Ryan \(2000\)](#), intrinsic motivation is a key factor that drives learners' engagement and persistence. When students feel a sense of progress and achievement, their motivation increases, leading to more positive emotional experiences. Feedback is another critical factor that influences both cognitive and emotional aspects of writing. [Hyland \(2003\)](#) emphasizes that feedback serves both pedagogical and interpersonal functions. Constructive feedback can enhance students' confidence and motivation, while overly critical feedback may increase anxiety and discourage engagement. Importantly, students' emotional responses to feedback are not uniform but depend on how they interpret it. Some learners perceive feedback as an opportunity for improvement, while others may interpret it as criticism. This suggests that feedback interacts with students' emotional states and self-efficacy, reinforcing the need to view emotional experiences in writing as dynamic and context-dependent.

## 2.3 Narrative inquiry and meaning making of emotional experiences

Given the complexity of emotional experiences, thematic narrative analysis provides an appropriate framework for exploring how students experience and interpret emotions in writing, as reflected in their personal narratives and reflections. This approach focuses on identifying recurring themes within participants' stories while still preserving the meaning and context of their experiences. Unlike phenomenology, which seeks to identify the essence of a shared lived experience, thematic narrative analysis emphasizes how individuals construct and interpret experiences through narratives. Similarly, while case study research focuses on developing an in-depth understanding of a bounded case or specific context, thematic narrative analysis prioritizes the emotional meanings and themes emerging across participants' stories. In contrast to general thematic analysis, which often fragments data into isolated

categories, thematic narrative analysis retains the narrative dimension of participants' experiences and emphasizes meaning-making within the stories they tell. [Riessman \(2008\)](#) argues that thematic narrative analysis focuses primarily on narrative content, examining what participants say about their experiences rather than on narrative structure or linguistic form. This approach facilitates the exploration of how emotional experiences are interpreted, connected, and shaped across different stages of the writing process.

In the context of L2 writing, this perspective is particularly important because emotional experiences are often subjective, dynamic, and deeply personal. Through narratives and reflections, students can describe their struggles, anxieties, achievements, and responses to feedback, providing insights into how emotions influence their writing engagement and development. Therefore, thematic narrative analysis not only captures the complexity of emotional experiences but also highlights the role of meaning-making in shaping students' engagement with writing. This aligns with the aim of the present study, which seeks to explore not only the emotions students experience but also how these emotions interact and how students interpret those experiences throughout the writing process. While various perspectives contribute to understanding emotional experiences in writing, this study primarily draws on Krashen's affective filter theory and Bandura's self-efficacy theory as the central analytical framework, with other perspectives serving as supporting lenses.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1 Research design

This study employed a qualitative research design using thematic narrative analysis to explore students' emotional experiences in writing English essays. This approach was selected because the study aimed to understand how students experienced, interpreted, and constructed meaning from their emotional experiences throughout the writing process. Unlike general thematic analysis, which primarily categorizes data into themes, thematic narrative analysis preserves the narrative context of participants' experiences by examining emotions through personal stories and reflections ([Rahmani et al., 2023](#)). The approach focuses not only on identifying recurring emotional themes but also on understanding how students narrate emotional changes, struggles, and meaning-making across different stages of writing.

Narrative elements informed both data generation and analysis in this study. During data collection, participants were encouraged to share personal stories, reflections, and emotional journeys related to essay writing through semi-structured interviews and reflective journals. Open-ended questions allowed participants to narrate experiences chronologically, including moments of anxiety, confidence, frustration, and achievement during the writing process. In the analysis stage, participants' narratives were examined holistically before being coded into recurring emotional themes. Rather than fragmenting responses into isolated categories, the analysis considered how emotions developed, interacted, and were interpreted within participants' stories over time. This approach enabled the study to explore not only what emotions students experienced but also how they constructed meaning from those emotional experiences.

#### 3.2 Research setting and participants

The participants were purposively selected, comprising three female and two male undergraduate students from the English Department at Universitas Negeri Makassar. They were in their third and fourth academic years, who had completed academic writing courses and had prior experience in writing English essays. Their English proficiency levels ranged from intermediate to upper-

intermediate, as indicated by their academic writing performance and classroom experience. The selection criteria included:

- (1) Students who had completed academic writing courses,
- (2) Students who had experience in writing English essays, and
- (3) Students who were willing to share their personal experiences and reflections regarding essay writing.

The use of five participants was considered appropriate because thematic narrative analysis emphasizes depth rather than breadth of data. Narrative-based qualitative research typically involves a small number of participants to allow in-depth exploration of individuals' experiences, emotional journeys, and meaning-making processes. The selected participants were considered information-rich cases because they had direct experience with English essay writing and could provide detailed narratives and reflections. In addition, data saturation was reached when recurring emotional themes and patterns consistently emerged across interviews and reflective journals.

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants. The pseudonyms represented students with different emotional experiences, confidence levels, and writing backgrounds to capture diverse perspectives related to EFL essay writing. Prior to participation, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided informed consent. Participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw at any stage without consequences. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, and identifiable information was removed from transcripts and reflective journals. Ethical permission for conducting the study was obtained from the English Department, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar.

### 3.3 Research instruments

#### 3.3.1 Semi-structured interview guide

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' emotional experiences during the process of writing English essays. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' perceptions, feelings, challenges, and responses to various stages of essay writing. The flexible format allowed participants to elaborate on personal experiences and emotional journeys while facilitating the exploration of emerging issues relevant to the study objectives. Sample interview questions included:

- (1) How do you usually feel when starting to write an English essay?
- (2) What kinds of emotional challenges do you experience during the writing process?
- (3) How do feedback and corrections affect your feelings about writing?
- (4) Can you describe a memorable emotional experience related to essay writing?
- (5) How do your emotions influence your confidence and writing performance?

#### 3.3.2 Reflective journal prompts

Reflective journals were used to capture participants' emotional experiences as they occurred throughout the writing process. Participants completed weekly journal entries over a four-week period, documenting their feelings, challenges, responses to feedback, and perceived changes in confidence and motivation. These journals provided longitudinal insights into participants' emotional development and served as a complementary data source to support triangulation. Sample journal prompts included:

- (1) Describe your feelings while writing your English essay this week.
- (2) What difficulties or emotional challenges did you experience during the writing process?
- (3) How did you respond to teacher feedback or corrections?
- (4) Did your emotions affect your motivation or confidence in writing? Explain.
- (5) What changes did you notice in your emotional experiences during the week?

### 3.4 Data collection procedures

The data collection process was conducted in several stages:

- (1) Preparation stage

The semi-structured interview guide and reflective journal prompts were developed based on the research objectives and relevant literature on emotions in EFL writing.

- (2) Participant recruitment

Five participants who met the selection criteria were recruited through purposive sampling. Prior to participation, participants were informed of the purpose of the study, informed consent was obtained, and assurances of confidentiality and voluntary participation were provided.

- (3) Interview stage

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted and lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. To encourage open discussion, a supportive and non-judgmental environment was established, and participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential.

- (4) Reflective journal stage

Following the interviews, participants completed weekly reflective journals over a four-week period. The journals documented emotional experiences encountered during essay-writing activities. Weekly follow-ups were conducted throughout the journal-writing period to maintain participant engagement and ensure the completion of journal entries.

- (5) Data organization

Interview transcripts and reflective journal entries were compiled, organized, anonymized, and prepared for thematic narrative analysis.

### 3.5 Data analysis procedures

The data were analysed using thematic narrative analysis, combining inductive coding with theory-informed interpretation. While initial coding was conducted openly to allow themes to emerge from the data, the analysis also considered how participants constructed and interpreted emotional experiences through their narratives and reflections. The analysis followed several stages:

(1) Data Familiarization

Interview transcripts and reflective journals were examined iteratively to obtain a holistic understanding of participants' emotional experiences and writing journeys.

(2) Initial Coding (Open Coding)

Meaningful statements related to emotions, writing challenges, confidence, and feedback experiences were identified and coded inductively.

(3) Categorization and Theme Development

Codes with similar meanings were grouped into broader emotional categories and then developed into overarching themes.

(4) Theoretical Interpretation

Themes were interpreted using Krashen's affective filter theory and Bandura's self-efficacy theory to explain how emotions influenced students' writing engagement and performance.

To facilitate systematic data management and coding, interview transcripts and reflective journal entries were organized in NVivo. The analysis process remained iterative, involving continuous comparison among codes, themes, narratives, and theoretical interpretations to ensure depth and consistency of interpretation. To enhance trustworthiness, credibility was strengthened through data triangulation between interviews and reflective journals, as well as member checking, in which participants reviewed summaries of interpretations to confirm representational accuracy. Dependability was maintained through an audit trail documenting coding decisions, theme development, and analytical revisions. Confirmability was supported through reflective note-taking to minimize bias and maintain close alignment between interpretations and participants' narratives. Detailed descriptions of the research context and participants were also provided to support transferability. Table 1 illustrates the coding process used in this study.

**Table 1.** Example of thematic narrative analysis process

Raw excerpt	Initial code	Category	Theme	Theoretical interpretation
"I feel nervous because I am afraid my grammar is wrong."	Fear of grammatical mistakes	Linguistic anxiety	Anxiety and fear of mistakes	High anxiety may increase the affective filter and reduce writing confidence ( <a href="#">Krashen, 1982</a> )
"After receiving positive feedback, I felt more confident writing the next essay."	Increased confidence after feedback	Positive emotional response	Motivation and confidence development	Positive feedback strengthens students' self-efficacy beliefs ( <a href="#">Bandura, 1997</a> )

In addition to thematic categorization, participants' narratives were reconstructed chronologically to preserve the continuity and context of their emotional experiences. Interview responses and reflective journals were examined holistically to understand how emotions developed, interacted, and changed throughout different stages of the writing process. Rather than treating emotional responses as isolated

data fragments, the analysis emphasized participants' emotional journeys and meaning-making processes across time. The analysis process was iterative, allowing continuous comparison between codes, themes, narratives, and theoretical interpretations to ensure depth and consistency of interpretation.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Overview of the findings

This section presents findings derived from semi-structured interviews and four-week reflective journals. Using thematic narrative analysis, the findings foreground participants' emotional journeys across different stages of the writing process. Rather than appearing as isolated emotional reactions, students' experiences revealed dynamic and interconnected emotional patterns that developed over time.

Participants described emotional experiences beginning with anxiety and uncertainty during the initial stages of writing, followed by hesitation and self-doubt during drafting, and eventually shifting toward relief, confidence, or renewed anxiety depending on feedback and perceived progress. Across participants' narratives, four interconnected themes emerged:

- (1) Emotional journeys of anxiety across the writing process
- (2) Confidence and self-doubt in expressing ideas
- (3) Motivation and emotional transformation through progress, and
- (4) Emotional responses to feedback

Importantly, the findings demonstrate that emotions were not experienced independently. Anxiety frequently influenced confidence and motivation, while supportive feedback often reduced anxiety and strengthened students' willingness to continue writing. The findings also reveal how students actively interpreted and constructed meaning from their emotional experiences throughout the writing process.

### 4.2 Emotional journeys of anxiety across the writing process

#### 4.2.1 Initial anxiety before writing

Most participants described experiencing anxiety and uncertainty before beginning essay assignments. This anxiety often emerged from fear of making mistakes, limited confidence in English proficiency, and concern about teacher evaluation. Participant B explained:

*“Before I start writing, I usually feel nervous because I am afraid my grammar is wrong. Sometimes I spend a long time thinking before writing the first sentence because I worry that my ideas are not good enough.”*

Similarly, Participant C described feelings of pressure immediately after receiving writing assignments:

*“When the lecturer gives an essay assignment, I immediately feel pressured. I think about whether I can finish it well or not. Sometimes I already feel tired before I even start writing.”*

Reflective journal entries also showed that these emotional reactions consistently appeared during the initial stages of writing. In a second-week journal entry, Participant D wrote:

*“I delayed writing today because I was afraid I would make many mistakes. I kept thinking that my vocabulary was limited and that my sentences would sound wrong.”* (Journal Entry, Week 2)

These narratives indicate that anxiety functioned as an emotional barrier before students actively engaged in writing. Participants frequently interpreted anxiety as evidence of their linguistic limitations, particularly regarding grammar and vocabulary. These findings suggest that initial anxiety was closely connected to students’ confidence and motivation before engaging in writing tasks. Participants who experienced stronger fear of making mistakes often showed lower confidence and greater hesitation in beginning their essays.

#### 4.2.2 Linguistic anxiety during drafting

As participants progressed into drafting, anxiety became closely connected to linguistic concerns. Students frequently paused, revised sentences repeatedly, or avoided continuing their essays because they doubted their language accuracy.

Participant A stated:

*“While writing, I often stop because I keep thinking about grammar. Even when I have ideas, I become unsure about how to write them correctly in English.”*

A journal entry from Participant B further illustrated this emotional struggle:

*“I deleted many sentences because I thought they were incorrect. I wanted to continue writing, but I became more anxious every time I checked my grammar.”* (Journal Entry, Week 3)

The narratives suggest that linguistic anxiety was not limited to fear of grammatical mistakes alone. Participants also associated anxiety with self-evaluation and fear of negative judgment from lecturers. As the writing process continued, emotional pressure often increased, particularly when participants struggled to organize ideas into academically acceptable English. As the drafting process continued, anxiety frequently interacted with students’ self-confidence and writing engagement. Participants who doubted their linguistic ability often became less willing to continue writing and spent excessive time revising sentences.

#### 4.2.3 Anxiety during revision and evaluation

Several participants reported that anxiety intensified during revision stages. Rather than perceiving revision as an opportunity for improvement, participants often interpreted the presence of errors as evidence of weak writing ability.

Participant E explained:

*“When I reread my essay and see many corrections, I feel disappointed in myself. Sometimes I feel that my writing ability is still very poor.”*

Similarly, reflective journals revealed emotional exhaustion during revision:

*“After checking my essay many times, I became confused and frustrated because I still found mistakes. I felt less confident submitting my writing.”* (Journal Entry, Week 4, Participant C)

These findings demonstrate that anxiety evolved throughout the writing process rather than occurring at isolated moments. Emotional experiences changed across stages of writing and were continuously shaped by students' perceptions of linguistic competence and academic expectations.

### 4.3 Confidence and self-doubt in expressing ideas

#### 4.3.1 Difficulty expressing ideas in English

Participants consistently described difficulties expressing ideas clearly in English, which contributed to feelings of self-doubt and low confidence.

Participant A stated:

*"Sometimes I know exactly what I want to say, but I cannot express it properly in English. That makes me feel less confident about my writing."*

Participant D similarly reflected:

*"I compare my writing with my classmates' writing, and I feel that my ideas are weaker because my English is limited."*

Reflective journals showed that these experiences frequently led participants to question their writing ability:

*"I spent too much time thinking about vocabulary because I did not want my essay to sound simple or incorrect."* (Journal Entry, Week 1, Participant A)

These narratives indicate that confidence was closely related to students' perceptions of their linguistic ability. Participants often interpreted difficulties in organizing and expressing ideas as signs of inadequate academic competence.

#### 4.3.2 Hesitation and delayed engagement

Low confidence also influenced participants' willingness to begin or continue writing tasks. Several students reported postponing writing because they doubted their ability to produce satisfactory essays.

Participant D explained:

*"I often delay writing because I feel unsure whether my essay will be good enough. Sometimes I avoid starting because I already expect difficulties."*

Reflective journal entries similarly revealed emotional hesitation:

*"I wanted to start my essay earlier, but I kept postponing it because I was worried that I would not write it well."* (Journal Entry, Week 2, Participant D)

These findings suggest that anxiety and confidence interacted continuously throughout the writing process. Students who experienced higher anxiety often reported lower confidence, leading to hesitation and reduced engagement with writing tasks. These findings indicate that emotional experiences influenced not only students' feelings but also their level of participation and persistence throughout the writing process. Anxiety and low confidence often reduced students' engagement and delayed task completion.

## 4.4 Motivation and emotional transformation through progress

### 4.4.1 Motivation through improvement

Although participants initially described negative emotions, several narratives revealed gradual emotional transformation as students perceived improvement in their writing ability.

Participant C explained:

*“When I compare my essays now with my previous writing, I feel more confident because I can see improvement. It motivates me to keep practicing.”*

Similarly, Participant B reflected:

*“At first I felt anxious all the time, but after receiving positive comments from my lecturer, I started believing that I could improve.”*

Reflective journals further illustrated this emotional shift:

*“This week I felt happier because I could organize my ideas more clearly than before. I still made mistakes, but I felt more confident continuing my essay.”* (Journal Entry, Week 4, Participant B)

These narratives indicate that emotional experiences were dynamic and capable of changing over time. Improvement and perceived achievement often reduce anxiety and strengthened students' confidence and motivation. As students perceived improvement in their writing ability, feelings of motivation and confidence gradually reduced anxiety and encouraged greater engagement with writing activities. This demonstrates that emotional experiences continuously evolved throughout the writing process.

### 4.4.2 Satisfaction after completing writing task

Participants also described feelings of relief and satisfaction after completing essays.

Participant E stated:

*“After finishing my essay, I usually feel relieved because I finally completed something difficult. Even if there are mistakes, I feel proud that I finished it.”*

A journal entry from Participant C similarly showed emotional satisfaction:

*“I felt tired after writing, but I was also happy because I managed to complete the essay independently.”* (Journal Entry, Week 4)

These findings demonstrate that positive emotional experiences frequently emerged after students successfully completed challenging writing tasks. Participants interpreted task completion as evidence of progress and personal achievement.

## 4.5 Emotional responses to feedback

### 4.5.1 Positive interpretations of feedback

Participants frequently describe supportive feedback as emotionally encouraging and helpful for improving writing.

Participant A explained:

*“When the lecturer explains my mistakes clearly and gives suggestions, I feel motivated to revise my essay because I understand how to improve it.”*

Reflective journals also showed that constructive feedback strengthened confidence:

*“The lecturer’s comments helped me realize that my writing was improving. I became more motivated to continue practicing.”* (Journal Entry, Week 3, Participant A)

Participants generally interpreted supportive feedback as guidance rather than criticism, which reduced emotional pressure and encouraged engagement. Supportive feedback frequently strengthened students’ confidence and motivation, which in turn reduced emotional pressure and encouraged them to continue revising and improving their essays.

### 4.5.2 Negative emotional responses to corrections

However, excessive corrections sometimes produce discouragement and frustration.

Participant B stated:

*“When there are too many corrections on my essay, I feel that my writing is very bad. Sometimes I become discouraged before revising it.”*

Participant E similarly reflected:

*“I understand that feedback is important, but too many corrections make me feel embarrassed about my writing ability.”*

Journal entries further revealed emotional tension related to feedback:

*“I felt anxious after receiving many corrections because I thought I disappointed my lecturer.”*  
(Journal Entry, Week 3, Participant E)

These narratives demonstrate that emotional responses to feedback depended largely on how students interpreted corrections. While supportive feedback often strengthened confidence and motivation, excessive corrections could intensify anxiety and self-doubt. In contrast, excessive corrections often intensified anxiety and self-doubt, negatively affecting students’ confidence and willingness to engage further in the writing process.

## 4.6 Emotional experiences as an interconnected system

Across participants’ narratives, emotional experiences emerged not as isolated reactions but as interconnected processes shaped continuously throughout the writing journey. Anxiety frequently

reduced confidence, low confidence contributed to hesitation, and supportive feedback often restored motivation and engagement. For example, Participant B initially described intense fear of grammatical mistakes and low confidence during drafting. However, after receiving supportive feedback and recognizing gradual improvement, the participant reported feeling more motivated and willing to continue practicing essay writing. Similar emotional transitions appeared across other participants' narratives and reflective journals. These findings indicate that emotional experiences in EFL writing operated as a dynamic emotional system in which anxiety, confidence, motivation, and feedback responses interacted continuously over time. Students did not merely experience emotions passively; rather, they actively interpreted emotional experiences and integrated them into their understanding of themselves as English writers.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Emotional experiences during the process of writing English essays

The findings of this study reveal that students encountered various emotional experiences throughout the process of writing English essays, including anxiety, self-doubt, motivation, relief, and emotional responses to feedback. These findings are consistent with previous studies on L2 writing anxiety and emotional experiences, which reported that EFL learners frequently experience fear of making grammatical mistakes, limited vocabulary, and fear of negative evaluation during writing activities ([Cheng, 2004](#); [Ro'ufiyati & Mahbub, 2023](#)). Similar to [Krashen \(1982\)](#) affective filter theory, anxiety in this study often functioned as an emotional barrier that reduced students' confidence and willingness to engage in writing tasks.

However, the present study extends previous findings by showing that emotional experiences were not static or isolated. Unlike many earlier studies that examined writing anxiety or self-efficacy separately, participants in this study experienced multiple emotions simultaneously and continuously across different stages of writing. Anxiety frequently appeared during planning and drafting stages, while motivation and relief emerged when students perceived improvement or successfully completed their essays. These findings suggest that emotional experiences in EFL writing are dynamic, evolving, and interconnected rather than fixed emotional conditions. The findings also reveal a unique insight regarding emotional temporality in writing. Participants' narratives and reflective journals demonstrated that emotions changed throughout the writing process depending on writing challenges, feedback experiences, and perceptions of linguistic competence. This indicates that emotional experiences in EFL writing should be understood as ongoing emotional journeys rather than isolated reactions

### 5.2 Emotional experiences and students' writing engagement and performance

The findings further demonstrate that emotional experiences significantly influenced students' writing engagement and performance throughout the writing process. Participants who experienced strong anxiety often hesitated to begin writing, delayed completing assignments, or repeatedly revised sentences because they lacked confidence in their linguistic ability. These findings support [Bandura \(1997\)](#) theory of self-efficacy, which emphasizes that individuals' beliefs about their abilities influence persistence, engagement, and performance. At the same time, the study found that positive emotional experiences such as motivation, confidence, and satisfaction encouraged greater participation and persistence in writing activities. Several participants reported becoming more motivated when they recognized improvement in their writing or received supportive feedback from lecturers. These findings are similar to previous studies highlighting the importance of motivation and supportive feedback in EFL writing development.

Nevertheless, a major contribution of this study is the proposed emotional interaction system in EFL writing. The findings demonstrate that anxiety, confidence, motivation, and feedback responses continuously influenced one another throughout students' writing experiences. For example, anxiety often reduced confidence and delayed writing engagement, while supportive feedback strengthened confidence and reduced emotional pressure. In turn, increased confidence improved students' willingness to continue writing despite difficulties. Unlike many previous studies that treated emotional variables independently, the present study shows that emotional experiences functioned as interconnected emotional processes shaping students' writing engagement and performance. This interconnected perspective contributes to EFL writing research by providing a more holistic understanding of how emotional experiences influence students' writing development over time.

### 5.3 Meaning-Making of emotional experiences in EFL writing

Another important finding of this study is that students actively interpreted and constructed meaning from their emotional experiences in essay writing. Through interviews and reflective journals, participants frequently associated anxiety with limited English proficiency and fear of academic failure. At the same time, improvement and successful task completion were interpreted as evidence of personal growth and developing writing ability. These findings align with [Riessman \(2008\)](#) perspective that narratives allow individuals to construct meaning from experiences through reflection and storytelling. Similarly, narratives provide insights into experiences within temporal, social, and contextual dimensions ([Clandinin & Connelly, 2004](#)). In this study, thematic narrative analysis enabled exploration of how students interpreted emotional experiences across different stages of writing and integrated those experiences into their perceptions of themselves as English writers.

The findings also highlight the importance of educational and sociocultural context in shaping emotional experiences. In the Indonesian EFL context, English is primarily learned in classroom settings and is rarely used extensively in everyday communication. Limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom may increase students' dependence on teacher evaluation and grammatical accuracy, which can intensify anxiety during writing tasks. In addition, teacher-centered educational practices and strong emphasis on linguistic correctness may contribute to students' fear of making mistakes and sensitivity toward feedback. Participants frequently interpreted grammatical errors as indicators of weak academic ability, suggesting that teacher expectations and classroom culture strongly shaped how students experienced and interpreted emotions during essay writing. Overall, the findings demonstrate that emotional experiences in EFL writing are shaped not only by individual psychological factors but also by interactions among emotions, feedback experiences, classroom expectations, and sociocultural learning environments. By applying thematic narrative analysis, this study provides deeper insights into how students experience, interpret, and construct meaning from emotional experiences throughout their writing journeys.

## 6. Conclusion

This study explored students' emotional experiences during the process of writing English essays in an EFL context using thematic narrative analysis. The findings reveal that students experienced various emotions, including anxiety, self-doubt, motivation, relief, and emotional responses to feedback throughout different stages of writing. These emotional experiences significantly influenced students' writing engagement and performance, shaping how they approached, continued, and evaluated their writing tasks.

A major contribution of this study is the identification of emotional experiences as an interconnected emotional interaction system in EFL writing. The findings demonstrate that anxiety, confidence,

motivation, and feedback responses continuously influenced one another throughout students' writing journeys rather than functioning as isolated emotional variables. This study also contributes methodologically by demonstrating the value of thematic narrative analysis in exploring emotional journeys, temporality, and meaning-making processes in EFL writing research. Through narratives and reflective journals, the study highlights how students actively interpreted and constructed meaning from emotional experiences during essay writing.

The findings further indicate that emotional experiences in EFL writing are shaped not only by individual psychological factors but also by educational and sociocultural contexts. Teacher expectations, classroom feedback practices, and limited opportunities to use English outside academic settings influenced how students experienced and interpreted emotions related to writing. Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the study relied heavily on self-reported emotional experiences obtained through interviews and reflective journals, which may not fully represent participants' actual emotional states during writing activities. Second, because thematic narrative analysis is inherently interpretive, the findings may have been influenced by subjective interpretations of participants' narratives despite efforts to ensure trustworthiness and analytical rigor. Third, the study was conducted within a specific Indonesian EFL context involving a small number of participants, limiting the transferability of the findings to other educational and sociocultural settings. Future research is recommended to involve more diverse participants and different educational contexts to further examine emotional experiences in EFL writing. Longitudinal studies and classroom-based observations may also provide deeper insights into how emotional experiences develop over time and how instructional practices influence students' emotional engagement in writing.

### Author's declaration

### Author contribution

**Harnita Rosalia:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Visualization. **Andi Nurul Annisa Budiman:** Supervision, Validation, Methodology, Writing – Review & Editing, Project Administration.

### Funding statement

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

### Data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and confidentiality considerations.

### Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the participants who willingly shared their experiences for this study. The authors also thank colleagues for their valuable support and assistance during the research process.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors are not affiliated with or involved in any organization or entity that has any financial interest (such as honoraria, educational grants, employment, consultancy, stock ownership, or other equity interests) or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge, or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

## Ethical clearance

This research involved human participants and was conducted in accordance with ethical standards. Permission was obtained from the English Department of Universitas Negeri Makassar, and all participants provided informed consent prior to their participation. Participants were informed of their right to participate voluntarily and the option to withdraw at any time.

## AI statement

The grammatical structure of this article was improved using AI-assisted tools, and the authors have carefully reviewed and validated all content to ensure accuracy and appropriateness. The authors take full responsibility for the content of this manuscript.

## Publisher's and Journal's Note

Researcher and Lecturer Society as the publisher, and the editor of Scientific English state that there is no conflict of interest towards this article publication.

## References

- An, H., & Li, S. (2024). Task-specific writing anxiety and self-efficacy are separate from general L2 writing anxiety and self-efficacy and they have differential associations with the effects of written corrective feedback in pre-task and within-task planning. *System*, 126, 103480. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103480>
- Arfiandhani, P., & Takeuchi, O. (2025). The interplay of grit, enjoyment, and self-efficacy among Indonesian pre-service EFL teachers: an SEM analysis. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 10(1), 23. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-025-00330-3>
- Bandura, A. (1997). Albert Bandura Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control. In *W.H Freeman and Company New York* (Vol. 43, Number 9). Cambridge University Pres.
- Cheng, Y. S. (2004). A measure of second language writing anxiety: Scale development and preliminary validation. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 13(4). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2004.07.001>
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2004). Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research. In *Visual Arts Research* (Vol. 27, Number 1). John Wiley & Sons.
- Daly, J. A. (1978). Writing Apprehension and Writing Competency. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 72(1), 10–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.1978.10885110>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4). [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104\\_01](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01)
- Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing. *College Composition & Communication*, 32(4). <https://doi.org/10.58680/ccc198115885>

- Hyland, K. (2003). *Second Language Writing*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667251>
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition. In *Metallurgical and Materials Transactions A* (Vol. 30, Number 8). Elsevier Science & Technology.
- Pajares, F. (2003). Self-efficacy beliefs, motivation, and achievement in writing: A review of the literature. *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, 19(2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/10573560308222>
- Putra, I. K. J. P., Padmadewi, N. N., & Ratminingsih, N. M. (2024). Students' Writing Anxiety in Learning English as a Foreign Language. *The Art of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TATEFL)*, 5(1), 11–20. <https://doi.org/10.36663/tatefl.v5i1.648>
- Rahmani, M., van Mulukom, V., & Farias, M. (2023). Believing in the Powers of Mindfulness: A Thematic Narrative Approach and the Development of a New Scale. *Mindfulness*, 14(7). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-023-02164-x>
- Razmi, M. H., & Ghane, M. H. (2024). The impact of written corrective feedback on students' writing performance, self-efficacy, and anxiety. *Journal of Writing Research*, 16(2). <https://doi.org/10.17239/jowr-2024.16.02.04>
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. Sage Publications.
- Ro'ufiyati, D. F., & Mahbub, Moh. A. (2023). Students' essay writing anxiety: A narrative study of Indonesian tertiary EFL learners. *JEES (Journal of English Educators Society)*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.21070/jees.v8i1.1717>
- Zhang, Q., & Jing, S. (2026). Predicting online learning persistence in EFL contexts: The interplay of L2 grit, self-efficacy, and learner satisfaction. *Acta Psychologica*, 264, 106484. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2026.106484>