



GENDER DIFFERENCES IN RHETORICAL PROBLEMS

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Abstract:

Writers may not like writing for a variety of reasons. Although it may seem that writers do not like the writing process when it comes to academic writing, many factors come into play to cause this problem among writers. This problem in writing is called rhetorical problem. Writers' rhetorical problems can be divided into two categories: rhetorical situation and writers' own goals. The purpose of this study is to explore rhetorical problems faced by writers. Specifically, this quantitative study investigates how the writing teacher and teaching method influence rhetorical problems. In addition to that, this study also explores the influence of perceived writing difficulties and fear of writing on rhetorical problems. A survey with 5 Likert scale was used as the instrument and 108 participants were randomly chosen. Findings revealed a variety of gender differences variety for different sub-sections.

Keywords: academic writing, rhetorical problems, rhetorical situation, writer's own goals

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

Many academic writers do not like writing because they find writing process difficult. This perception of writing being difficult and not likeable would then discourage writers to avoid writing activities as much as they could. Writing teachers would agree that teaching writing is not an easy task especially when students already bring into the classroom this perception about writing. According to Rahmat (2011), the vital components that make up a writing classroom environment are teachers' role, teaching methods, and also learners' role.

Figure 1 shows the connection of factors in the writing classroom. The learner's role is affected by many factors surround him/her. The learner's role in the writing is influenced by the teachers' role. What the teacher did or did not do would affect the learners' perception on writing. In addition to that, the use of suitable teaching methods would play an important role in the teaching and learning of writing.

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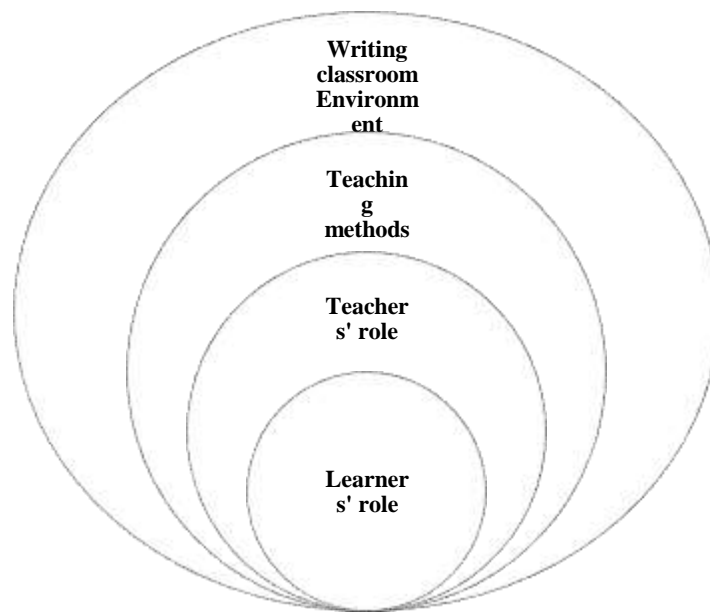


Figure 1: Writing Classroom Environment (Source: Rahmat, 2011)

Writers do face problems when they write. Flower and Hayes (1980) introduced the term 'rhetorical problem' to refer to the categories of problems writers face throughout the writing process. The problems that writers face can be categorized into two; (a) rhetorical situation and (b) writer's own goal. Rhetorical situation refers to the circumstances that the writer is faced with when they write. Writers may be faced with the issues about the assignment and also how to prepare for the audience. In a writing class, teachers teaching writing would focus on these two aspects to improve on students' writing. Next, writer's own goal here refers to the writer making his/her personal attempts to make the writing a success.

1.2 Statement of Problem

It is not uncommon for writers to face rhetorical problems when they write. However, many writers were able to overcome the rhetorical problems as their writing skills improved. Nevertheless, some studies reported that some writers have to deal with their fear of writing. According to Rahmat (2019), One of the major problems in writing is not lack of linguistic competence of the writer. The source of difficulty is the lack of competence in composing. Recall the way we were taught writing- we spent much time thinking of "what" to write" but when it comes to the process of writing, we are alone. Unfortunately, teachers think it is the writing and language skills only and writing instruction focused on the two aspects. Yet, writers continue to face other non-language or non-writing skills issues. What are these factors that contribute to rhetorical problems for writers? Furthermore, the study by Reily, Neeman and Andrews (2019) discovered that the magnitude of gender gap in writing ability is sufficiently large that it may warrant further research.

1.3 Objective of Study and Research Questions

The main objective of this study is to explore rhetorical problems faced by writers. Aspects such as rhetorical situation and writer's own goals contribute to the rhetorical problems. Specifically,

this study investigates how the writing teacher and teaching method influence rhetorical problems. In addition to that, this study also explores the influence of perceived writing difficulties and fear of writing on rhetorical problems. This current study is done to answer the following questions;

- 1) How can the rhetorical situation be described in terms of writing teacher and teaching method across gender?
- 2) How can the writers' own goal be described in terms of perceived writing difficulties and fear of writing across gender?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This section discusses issues related to writing and fear of writing across gender. Next, the researcher summarizes past studies on perceived writing difficulties and fear of writing. Finally, this section end with the theoretical framework of this current study.

2.2 Writing and Fear of Writing across Gender

There are some common techniques in the teaching of writing. Flower and Hayes (1980) outlined three main levels of writing: planning, drafting, and evaluating. Many writing teachers adhered to these three basic stages when planning writing lessons. In addition to that Fadda (2011), suggested three main methods in teaching writing. Firstly, writing teachers should teach students how to write outlines before writing a draft. Next, teachers should teach the basic three steps of planning, writing and revision in the writing process. Finally, students should be taught how to review what they have written before submission.

Students learning writing found various aspects of writing difficult. According to Badrasawi, Zubairi & Idrus (2016), writers sometimes lacked the ability to organise ideas. They also were found to lack expressions and sentence structure skills, as well as vocabulary. Fadda (2011) adds that writers found it difficult to avoid plague words and phrases. Writers also found it difficult to review the grammar in their writing. They also experienced difficulty in using pronouns and maintaining pronoun-antecedent agreement. They admitted to making mistakes with subject-verb agreement. They also admitted to making sentence fragments in their writing as well as experienced difficulty when combining sentences in their writing. This is also agreed by Al-Mukdad (2019) who found similar difficulties. The writers found that brainstorming was not easy. They could not organise their thoughts. They could not revise because they could not see their mistakes. Many writers also admitted they paid attention to language instead of content when it come sot revising their work.

Past studies have shown that many writers have writing anxiety and this anxiety stemmed from many causes. Badrasawi, Zubairi, & Idrus (2016) found that writers feared they did not have enough time to write. They did not like to share what they had written to others. This is worrying because one sign of good writers is audience awareness (Rahmat, 2016). Some studies have found gender differences in writing issues. The study by Camarata and Woodcock (2006) found that female writers scored significantly higher in writing achievement than their male counterparts. In a different context, Kamari, Gorjian, and Pazhakh (2012) conducted a study on

150 students at Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz and compared both genders in terms of proficiency in writing a descriptive paragraph and an opinion paragraph. The results showed that male students are more superior in writing an opinion paragraph essay while female students are better in writing a descriptive one. Ng (2010) found the differences between 30 boys and 30 girls in learning English writing in Hong Kong. Their study revealed that girls made fewer grammatical mistakes than boys. Moreover, the girls have higher mean score in the attitudes of learning English writing than the girls.

2.3 Past Studies

Some studies have been conducted to investigate writing problems among students. The study by Rahmat, Arepin, Yunos, Rahman (2017) looked into students' perceived difficulties towards ESL academic writing. 373 students from seven faculties participated in the study. The participants responded to 25 items on 5 Likert-scale (always, very often, sometimes, rarely and never). The questionnaires were analyzed to determine the students' perceived difficulties on ESL academic writing. Mean score, t-test and one way ANOVA were used to report on the findings. Findings revealed students found writing to be difficult for several reasons such as punctuation, language and writing skills. Next the study by Al-Mukdad (2019) investigated academic writing problems encountered by students at Arab International University (AIU) who took the Academic Writing module (AWR). The purpose of the study was to investigate this problem from the perspective of students. The data was collected through distributing a questionnaire to 50 students from different majors at AIU. Results suggested that students perceived all aspects of academic writing to be difficult. One reason is that they poorly recognize the difference between academic and general English writing due to the lack of background knowledge about writing academically. Another prime reason is attributed to having problems in different linguistic elements even at this supposedly high proficiency levels.

Next, there are also studies to show that there are gender differences in writing achievement. Neumann, and Andrews (2019) examined 3 decades of U.S. student achievement in reading and writing from the National Assessment of Educational Progress to determine the magnitude of gender differences. Examination of effect sizes found a developmental progression from initially small gender differences in Grade 4 toward larger effects as students' progress through schooling. Differences for reading were small-to-medium, and medium-sized for writing. Additionally, there were pronounced imbalances in gender ratios at the lower left and upper right tails of the ability spectrum. In addition to that, the study by Anggraini (2016) investigated whether or not there was significant difference in students' writing achievement on the basis of gender. The study also investigated (b) whether or not there was significant difference in writing achievement on the basis of writing anxiety, and (c) whether or not there was significant difference in writing achievement on the basis of gender. 110 undergraduate students, 55 male students and 55 female students, of English Study Program participated in the study. The samples were selected by using purposive sampling. The data were collected mainly from the students' essays and questionnaire of Foreign Language Writing Anxiety Scale. Then, the data were analysed quantitatively. The result showed that firstly, student's gender was not significant variable in writing achievement statistically. Secondly, there was statistically significant difference in writing achievement on the basis of writing anxiety level (i.e., low and

medium level of writing anxiety). Finally, students' writing anxiety showed no statistically significant difference on the basis of gender. However, the findings indicated that statistically, there was significant difference in low level of writing anxiety of male and female students. Closer analysis resulted that students' writing anxiety were affected by evaluation apprehension. Very poor writing achievement was derived from the students' ability.

Interesting studies were also conducted to look into gender differences for writing skills and writing style. The study by Suganob-Nicoau and Sukamto (2016) investigated the Indonesian EFL students' proficiency in writing complex sentences and explored the gender differences in their writing products. Thirty-eight (38) high school students – 19 males and 19 females – were instructed to write a narrative account of the silent movie, "The Pear Film", immediately after watching it. The result of the study revealed that the students' production of sentence complexity exhibited a sequential degree of difficulty from simple sentence (1 T-unit) to more complex sentences (2 T-units or 3 T-units). Female students had higher frequencies in producing T-units, and they also exhibited a more powerful imagination and creativity in building complex sentences. However, the males outnumbered the females in the production of lexical variety. This indicated that longer sentences are not always directly related to the breadth of vocabulary knowledge. Next, the study by Bataineh and Al-Hamad (2018) EFL writing with special reference to gender. The treatment encompasses a *WhatsApp*-based instructional program designed specifically to help develop writing performance, along the aspects of *content and ideas, organization and mechanics, vocabulary, and language use*, among 98 Jordanian eleventh-grade students. The participants were divided into two experimental groups, one male and one female, taught through *WhatsApp*. The data were collected by means of a pre-/ post-test whose analysis revealed improved writing performance, more for female participants than for their male counterparts. The findings revealed that female students outperformed male students on all the components of the writing test and on the test overall. This superior performance, which is consistent with previous research accounts, may be attributed to a host of factors. It has been reported that while female students tend to use the Internet for communication with family and friends and for school research and academic purposes, male students tend to use the Internet for leisure and entertainment.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Figure 2 presents the theoretical framework of the study. This study explored rhetorical problems faced by writers. According to Flower and Hayes (1980), the rhetorical problems can be seen from two angles. Firstly, rhetorical situation is considered difficult by the writer due to the (i) writing teacher and the (ii) teaching method. The writers' efforts to achieve the writer's own goals is obstructed by two factors: (i) the writer's perceived difficulties (Rahmat, Arepin, Yunos, Rahman, 2017). Writers face difficulties in punctuations, language and writing skills. Finally, according to Cheng (2004), there are (ii) three types of writing anxiety. The first type is somatic anxiety refers to the physical aspects of writing fear. Cognitive anxiety refers to the fear of writing that the writers think of in his/her mind. Finally, writers using avoidance behaviour anxiety would have negative expectations of their writing. They would also have preoccupation with performance, and they are concerned about the perception of others.

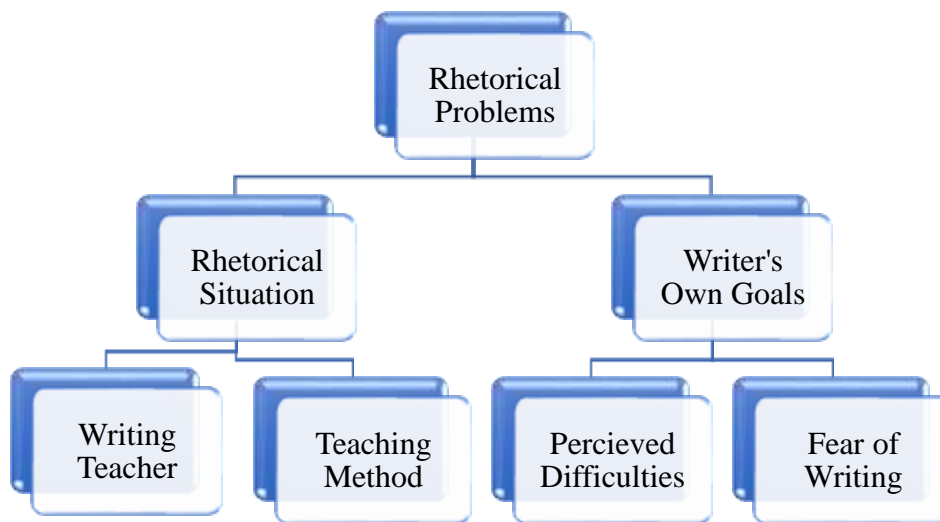


Figure 2: Theoretical Framework of the study

(Source: Flower and Hayes 1980; Rahmat, Arepin, Yunos & Rahman, 2017; and Cheng, 2004)

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Sample

This quantitative study is carried out to explore gender differences for rhetorical problems faced by writers. 108 respondents were chosen from undergraduates from a public university for the study; 34 were male students and 74 were female students. The participants were randomly chosen from a group of students who attended academic writing course. The instrument chosen used a 5 point Likert scale containing 56 items.

3.2 Instrument

The instrument is a survey. The survey is rooted from Flower and Hayes (1980), Rahmat et al. (2017) and Cheng (2004). Section A contains questions about Rhetorical Situation.

This section is further sub-divided into;

1. Writing Teacher (5 items),
2. Teaching Methods (4 items).

Section B contains questions on Writer's Own Goals. This section is subdivided into;

1. Percieved Difficulties:
 - Punctuation (9 items),
 - Language Use (7 items),
 - Writing Skills (9 items).
2. Writing Anxiety:
 - Somatic Anxiety (7 items),
 - Cognitive Anxiety (8 items),
 - Avoidance Behaviour Anxiety (7 items).

Table 1 shows the reliability statistics for the instrument, showing a Cronbach alpha score of 0.961 thus showing that the instrument chosen is reliable.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|------------------|------------|
| .961 | 56 |

3.3 Data Collection and data Analysis Method

Data is collected through Goggle form. The responses were recorded and analysed using SPSS. Results are presented using mean scores.

4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Rhetorical Situation

Research Question 1: How can the rhetorical situation be described in terms of writing teacher and teaching method across gender? According to Flower and Hayes (1980), rhetorical situation refers to the condition in which the writer is in. This current study refers to the (i) writing teacher and (ii) teaching method.

(i) Writing Teacher

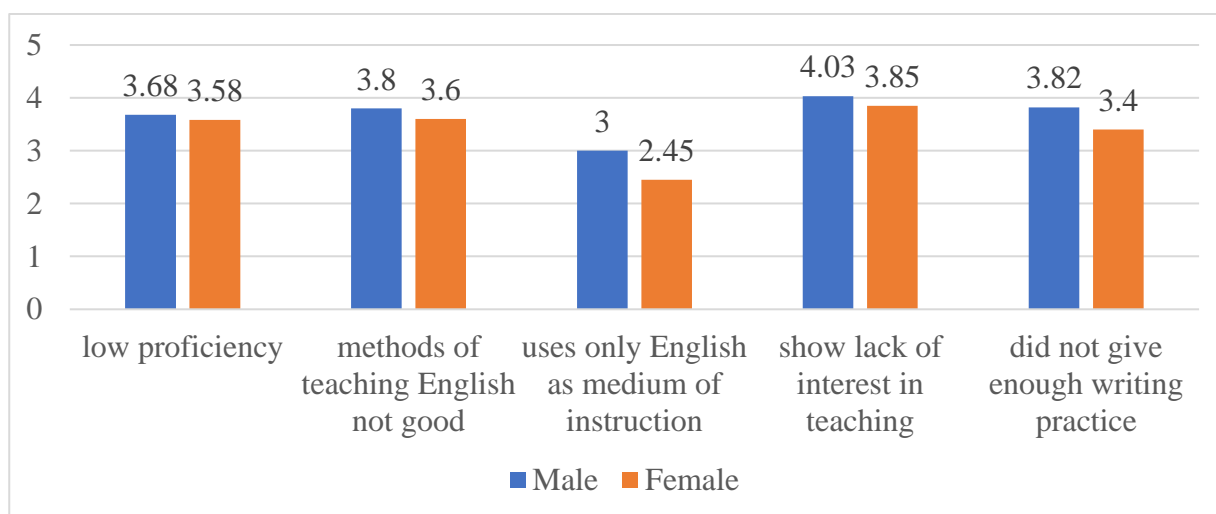


Figure 3: Mean Score for Writing Teaching

(ii) Teaching Method

This section reports whether there are differences in expectation of the writing teacher by genders. Figure 3 shows the mean score for 'writing teacher'. Generally, the male respondents had higher mean for expectations than their female counterparts. Interestingly, the respondents were able to know that the teacher "lacked interest in teaching writing"; the male writers showed a mean of 4.03, while the female writers reported a mean of 3.85. Next, the male respondents (3.8) reported higher mean than female respondents (3.6) when it comes reporting that the teachers' used methods of teaching English was not good.

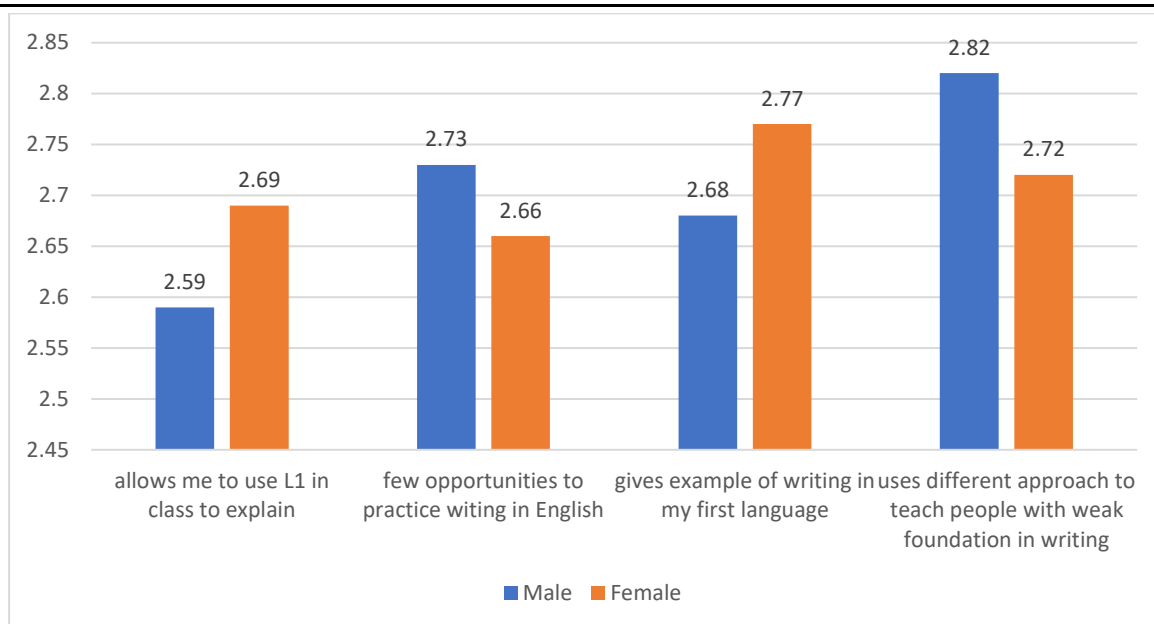


Figure 4: Mean for Teaching Method

Next, this section investigates whether there is a difference in gender when it comes to expectations of the teaching method. Figure 4 presents the mean score for ‘teaching method’. Two items showed that the male participants had higher mean value. The male respondents in this study felt that in their writing class, they were not given enough “opportunities to practice writing in English” (2.73) compared to female respondents (2.66). Next, the male participants in this study agreed that the teacher should “use different approaches to teach writing” (2.82) compared to the female (2.72) respondents.

On the other hand, the female respondents in this study liked that their writing teacher “allows them to use their first language” (2.69) compared to the male (2.59) respondents. In addition to that, the female respondents like that the teacher “give examples of writing in their first language” (2.77) compared to male respondents (2.68).

4.2 Writer’s Own Goals

Research Question 2: How can the writers’ own goal be described in terms of perceived writing difficulties and fear of writing across gender? Writer’s own goals is described in terms of what the writers (i) perceived as difficult and also how the writers (ii) fear writing.

(i) Perceived Difficulties

Writers perceived writing as difficult because they had problems with (a) punctuation, (b) language use and (c) writing skills.

(a) Punctuation

Generally, writers felt that they had problems with the use of full stops, question marks, exclamation marks, and commas. They are also sometimes confused with the use of full stops and commas. They are sometimes confused with the use of colon and semi-colons. They also face problems with the use of question marks in dialogues, the use of commas between words in a list, as well as apostrophes in contractions and possessives.

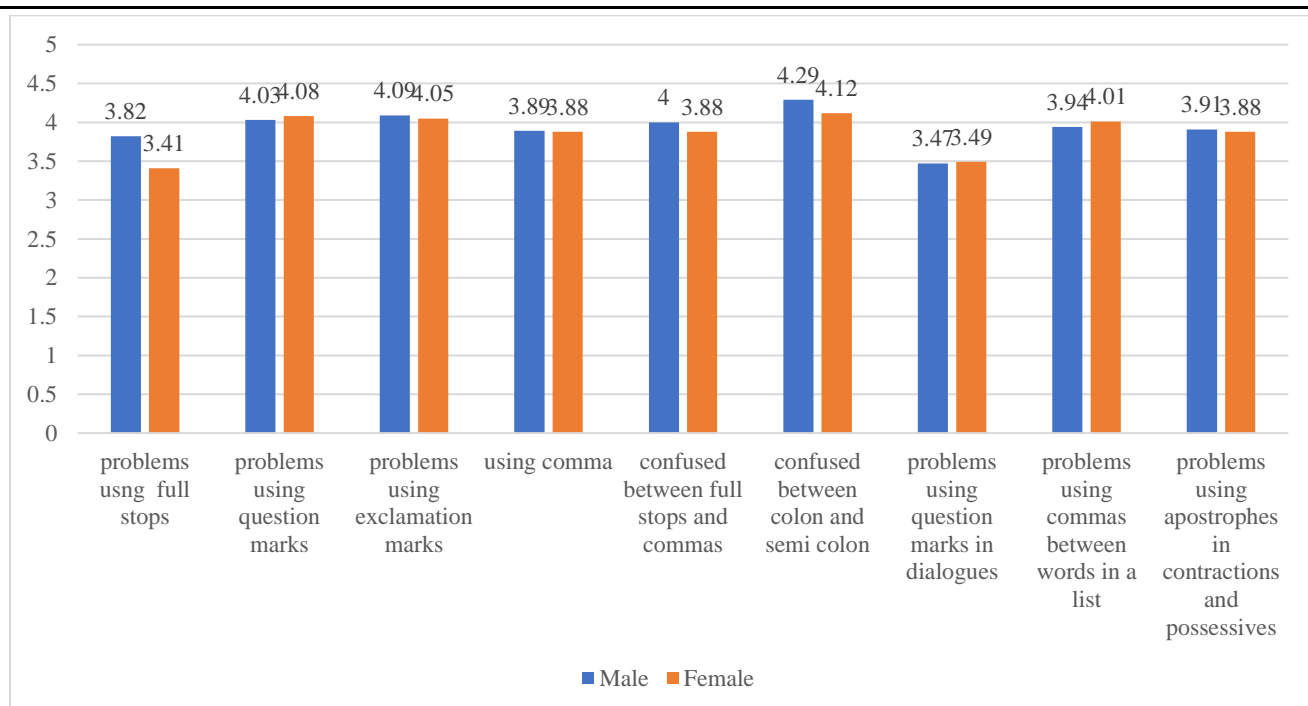


Figure 5: Mean Score for Punctuation

Figure 5 shows the mean score for punctuation. The male (3.82) respondents in this study reported a higher mean for “problems using full stops” compared to female (3.42) respondents. Both male and female respondents had almost the same lowest mean for “problems using question marks in dialogues” (male=3.47 and female=3.49). In addition to that both male and female respondents had the highest mean for confusion when using “colon and semi-colon” (male=4.29; female=4.12).

(b) Language Use

Writers face several problems with language use. Firstly, they face problems using appropriate language. Next, they may face problems using synonyms/antonyms version of same repeated words.

The mean scores for language use are shown in Figure 6. Both male (3.25) and female (2.58) respondents in this current study reported highest mean for “problems using appropriate language in writing. Male writers scored higher mean score than female writers for “problems using synonyms/antonyms” (male=2.91 and female=2.61) and also for problems to “translate their first language when they write” (male=2.76 and female=2.61).

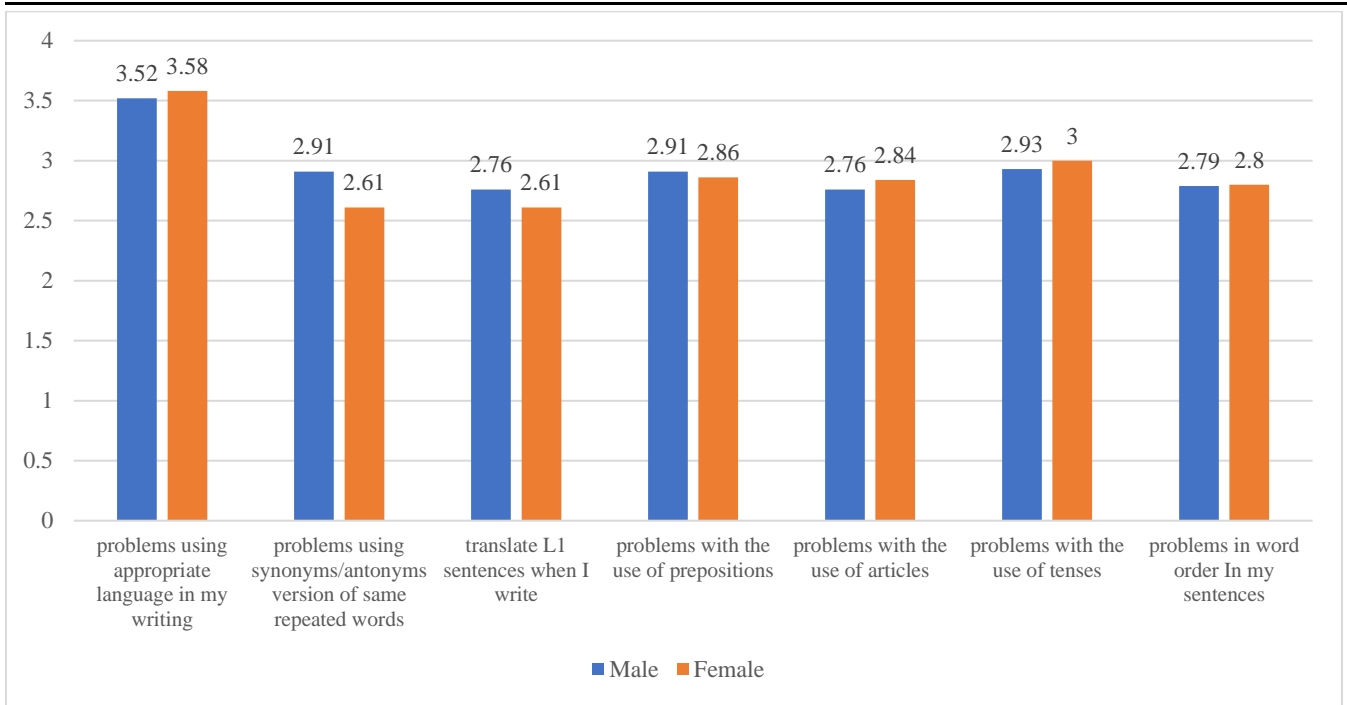


Figure 6: Mean Score for Language Use

(c) Writing Skills

Writers do face problems with some writing -related skills. Among some of the writing-related skills are problem with spelling, summarising, paraphrasing, in-text citation, and end-of text citation. In addition to that, they also face problems writing introductions, conclusion the thesis statement as well as the topic sentences.

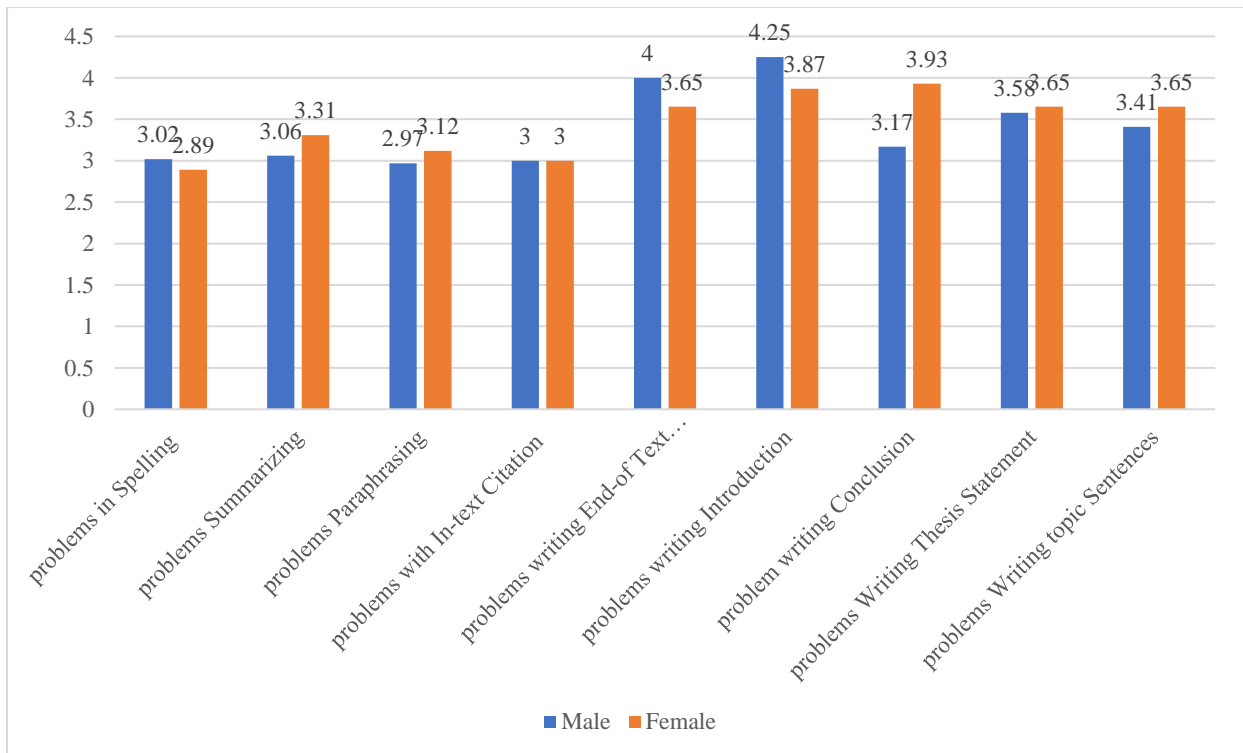


Figure 7: Mean for Writing Skills

Figure 7 presents the mean scores for writing skills. High mean scores were reported for three items. Firstly, both male and female respondents had high means for “problems with end-of-text” (male=4 and female=3.65). Next, both genders had high mean scores for “problems with writing introduction” (male=4.25 and female=3.87). Female respondents reported higher mean (3.93) for “problems writing conclusion” than male respondents (3.17).

(ii) Writing Anxiety

(a) Somatic Anxiety

According to Rezaei and Jafari (2014), somatic anxiety refers to the writers’ expressions of emotional activation and stress and negative feelings towards writing-related activities. This type writing anxiety makes the writers go into the blank and panic mode when they begin writing.

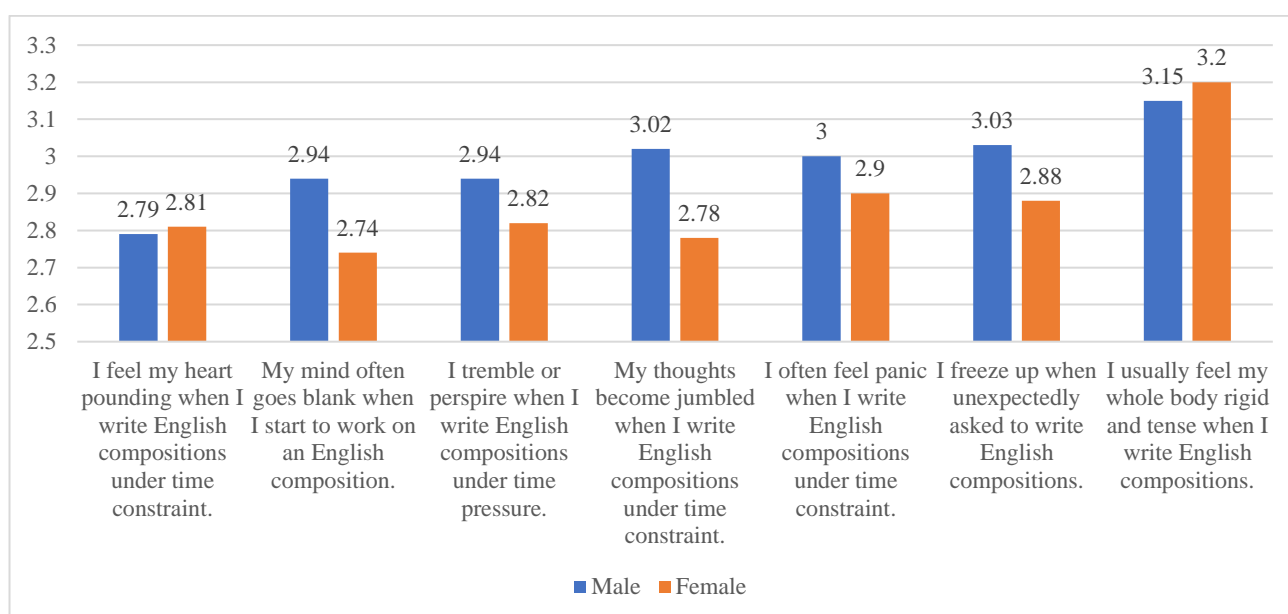


Figure 8: Mean Score for Somatic Anxiety

Figure 8 presents the findings for somatic anxiety across gender. Both genders report high mean (male=3.13 and female=3.2) for “feeling rigid and tense when they write English compositions”. All items showed male respondents had higher mean than female respondents except for “heart pounding when they write English compositions under time constraints” (male=2.79; female=2.81) and “feeling rigid when they write English compositions” (male=3.15; female=3.12).

(b) Cognitive Anxiety

Cheng (2004) reports that cognitive anxiety includes negative expectations of writing. Writers may also have preoccupation with their writing performance and are concerned about the perception of others on their writing.

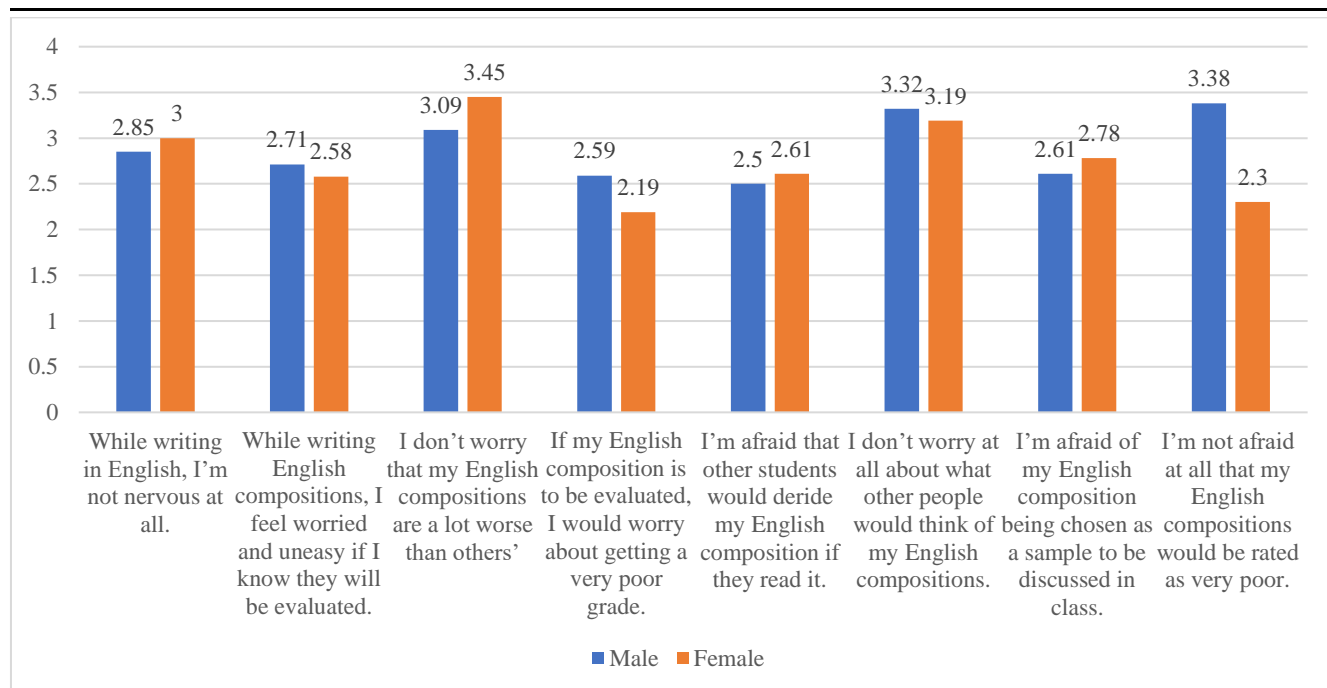


Figure 9: Mean Score for Cognitive Anxiety

Figure 9 shows the mean for cognitive anxiety for male and female participants in this current study. Male participants had highest mean for “not being afraid that their compositions to be rated low” (male=3.38; female=2.3). This means the female participants were more concerned about getting their composition to be well rated. Four items showed higher mean for female participants. Firstly, the female participants had higher mean for “not feeling nervous” (male=2.85; female=3). Next, the female participants had higher mean for “not worrying if their English compositions are a lot worse than others” (male=3.09; female=3.45). The female participants also had higher mean for “not being afraid that other student would decide their composition when they read it” (male=2.5; female=2.62). Finally, the female respondents had higher mean for “not afraid if their composition was chosen as sample” (male=2.61; female=2.78).

(c) Avoidance Behaviour Anxiety

Cheng (2004) reports that avoidance behaviour is the type of anxiety where the students avoid writing altogether. In the worst-case scenario, students do not attend writing classes, or they may choose not to do their writing tasks. This is the worst type of writing anxiety because writers avoid writing.

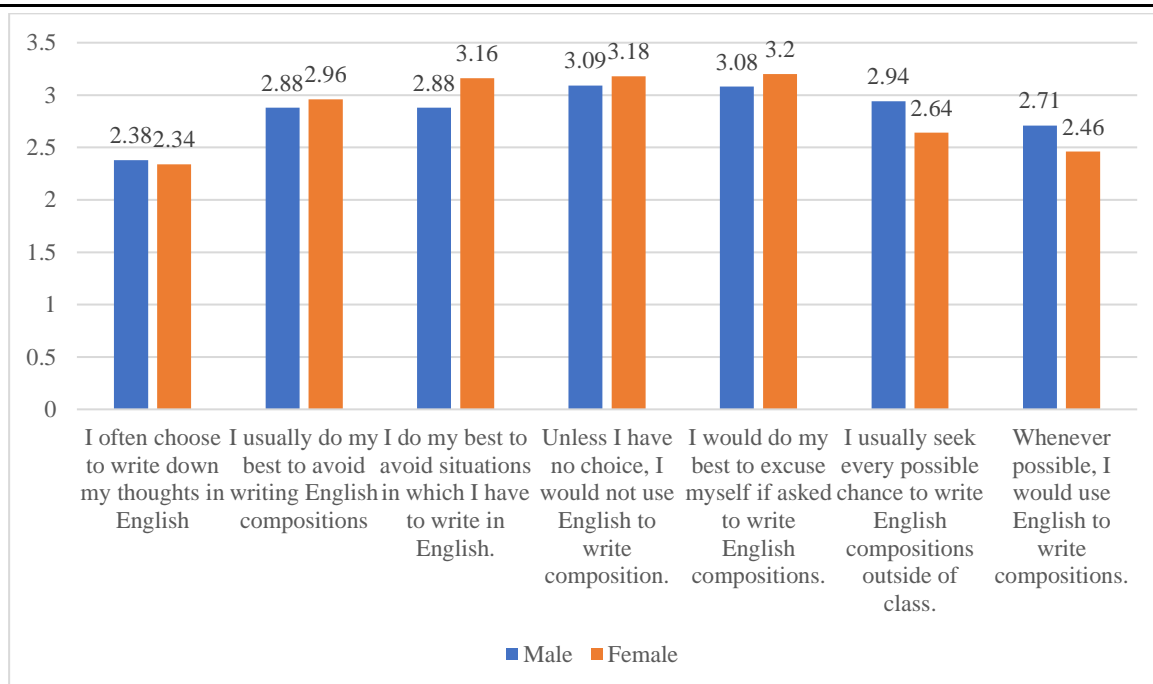


Figure 10: Mean Score for Avoidance Behaviour Anxiety

The mean score for avoidance behaviour is shown in Figure 10. The female participants appeared to have higher mean scores than the male participants for four items out of seven items. Firstly, the female had higher mean for “do my best to avoid writing English compositions” (male=2.88, female=2.96). Next, the female respondents had higher mean for “do my best to avoid situations in which I have to write in English” (male=2.88, female=3.26), “unless I have the choice, I have no choice I would not use English to write compositions” (male=3.09, female=3.18) and finally “do my best to excuse myself when asked to write English composition” male=3.08; female=3.2).

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings and Discussion

The purpose of this current study was explored gender differences for rhetorical problems. According to Flower and Hayes (1980), writers facing rhetorical problems are faced with two types of problems and they are; (a) rhetorical situation and (b) writers’ own goals. Findings analysed in this study described (a) rhetorical situation in terms of how learners felt about their writing instructor and also teaching methods used. The analysis of data from this current study showed a variety of gender influence on the variables. As far as writing teacher is concerned, male respondents showed higher mean scores. However, for teaching methods, data did not reveal differences in gender perception. The study by Fadda (2011) did not reveal gender differences when it comes to teaching expectations from students.

Next, the findings also described (b) writers’ own goals in terms of perceived writing difficulties and fear of writing. As far as perceived writing difficulties, responses from both genders varied which means gender differences occur for different perceived difficulties. The study by Sukanob-Nicoau and Sukamto (2016) found that female writers faced more difficulties in language use compared to their male counterparts. When it comes to fear of writing, male

respondents reported higher mean for somatic anxiety, female respondents reported higher mean for cognitive anxiety and avoidance behaviour. The study by Anggraini (2016) found that there were no gender differences when it comes to types of fear. The study also revealed that both genders feared evaluation.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The findings for this current study cannot be generalized for all undergraduate writers. Further research should be carried out to explore more issues pertaining to rhetorical problems on different categories of students. The aim of looking at gender differences for rhetorical problems was not to suggest different genders be taught differently when it comes to academic writing. The main focus of this current study also not for writing instructors to address the differences or to teach differently. According to Camarata & Woodcock (2006), knowing the differences exist encouraged instructors to plan more writing-related activities to help increase motivation and confidence among writers with a variety of background.

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