

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a brief explanation of some theories that support the study. The theories are related to performance anxiety, characteristics of TikTok as one of the social media platforms, and the explanation of Systemic Functional-Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA).

A. Theoretical Review

1. Academic Writing in Higher Education

Academic writing is an essential component of higher education that requires not only linguistic competence but also critical thinking and research skills. It is a complex and meticulous learning process necessitating proficiency in multiple areas such as research skills, structured and coherent argumentation (Kim et al., 2025). It is a key medium in higher education settings to demonstrate students' comprehension, critical thinking, and knowledge of their disciplines. University students are expected to produce various type of academic works, including theses, research papers, and essays. According to Crossley (2020), the characteristics of academic writing include the use of academic vocabulary (lexical sophistication), complex sentence structures (syntactic complexity), and coherent relationships between ideas across paragraphs (text cohesion). These three aspects are the main determinants of the quality and development of academic writing.

However, academic writing becomes even more challenging for students in foreign language settings. This is because foreign language students, unlike native speakers, have to simultaneously master academic literacy and linguistic competence, which demand a high level of disciplinary knowledge and language awareness (Fadhly, 2022). AlMarwani (2020) also stated that students frequently face difficulties with academic writing due to their limited exposure to academic discourse,

academic literacy, and language proficiency. Therefore, the difficulty of academic writing for these students is inseparably linked to the affective aspects of foreign language learning, especially the anxiety that arises from using the language).

2. Foreign Language Anxiety

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is a central concept in understanding the emotional challenges faced by learners in foreign language learning. The concept of FLA, first introduced by Horwitz et al. (1986), serves as the foundational framework for explaining learners' emotional responses in language learning contexts. FLA refers to the specific feeling of tension, apprehension, and worry experienced when using or learning a foreign language, particularly in speaking, listening, and writing situations. Unlike general anxiety, FLA only emerges within the process of learning and using a foreign language. Horwitz et al. (1986), identified three interrelated components of FLA: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension involves difficulty in speaking or understanding in real-time, test anxiety relates to fear of failure in language assessments; and fear of negative evaluation stems from worrying about others' judgments. The study by Ekalestari et al. (2023) revealed that these components of FLA are closely intertwined in the EFL context, where communication apprehension often triggers test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Students who experience this type of anxiety tend to avoid classroom interactions or written tasks that require language production, which ultimately hinders their linguistic development.

Building on this, Malik (2021) explored FLA in relation to the psychological, cognitive, linguistic, and academic factors that contribute to communication apprehension among EFL learners. Similarly, Marnani (2024) found that FLA indicators like communication apprehension are influenced by the quality and tone of teachers' feedback. Students often

feel that their academic writing; a specific kind of language learning, is being corrected rather than developed, which fosters a sense of alienation from their own language identity. In conclusion, Sowapruks (2021) supports the idea that students' sense of identity and belonging in academic settings influences their anxiety when learning a foreign language. This perspective lays the foundation for understanding a more specific manifestation of FLA, writing anxiety, by framing it as a complex emotional experience that underlies students' difficulties in learning and using a foreign language.

3. Second Language Writing Anxiety

Writing is one of the essential productive skills that English learners must master in a foreign language. Understanding the emotional aspects that accompany this skill is crucial for improving learners' performance and confidence. The concept of Second Language Writing Anxiety proposed by Cheng (2004), along with the development of the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), provides an important theoretical foundation for this study. It refers to the feelings of tension, worry, and fear experienced by learners when producing written texts in second or foreign language. Cheng (2004) conceptualized writing anxiety as a multidimensional construct consisting of three components: somatic anxiety (physical symptoms of nervousness), cognitive anxiety (negative thoughts or worries about writing performance), and avoidance behavior (tendencies to delay or avoid writing tasks). These dimensions are measured through the SLWAI, which has been widely used to explore writing anxiety among EFL learners.

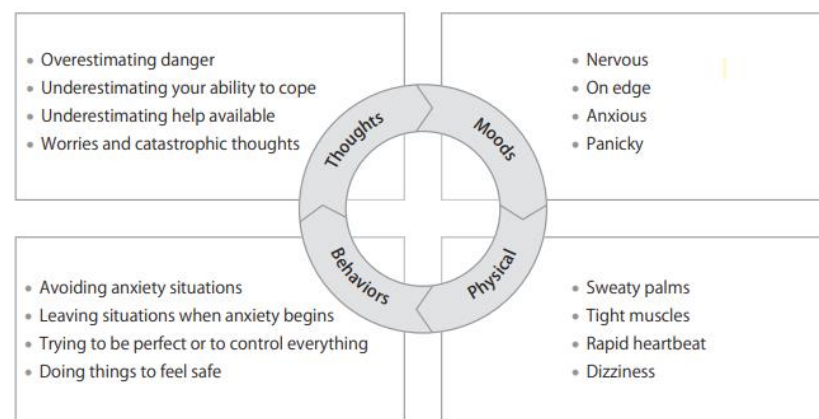
Numerous studies have adopted the SLWAI to investigate the nature and impact of writing anxiety among EFL learners in different contexts. For instance, Yenti and Susanti (2025) discovered that low self-efficacy, inadequate writing practice, and fear of negative evaluation are the main causes of writing anxiety among Indonesian EFL students. These

psychological factors often hinder students from fully engaging in the writing process, thereby reducing their confidence and increasing their tendency to avoid writing tasks. Similarly, Rohmah and Muslim (2021) highlighted that students who engage more frequently in writing activities tend to exhibit lower levels of anxiety, whereas those with limited writing exposure and greater fear of teacher evaluation experience higher anxiety levels.

Overall, these researches show that academic anxiety emerges from the interaction of language proficiency, feedback practices, and affective elements such as fear and self-confidence. Gaining an understanding of these dynamics is essential for exploring how students manage and externalize their anxiety, especially in digital and multimodal platforms where identities and emotions can be more freely expressed.

Building on this, Greenberger and Padesky (2016) summarized the types of symptoms that are common in anxiety.

Figure 1. *Profile of Anxiety Symptoms*



The image illustrates that anxiety is a psychological condition involving four main indicators, namely thoughts, moods, physical responses, and behaviors. Each aspect is explained as follows:

a.) Thoughts

Thoughts in this context refer to the cognitive processes that occur in students' minds when they face an academic defense, a situation commonly perceived as serious and high-stakes. Individuals who experience anxiety tend to overestimate the level of danger and underestimate their ability to cope with the situation. In addition, individuals often feel that they do not have adequate support or assistance and are overwhelmed by worries and catastrophic thoughts. This thought causes individuals to perceive situations negatively, thereby increasing their level of anxiety.

b.) Moods

Moods refer to emotions that arise as a result of thoughts. In this context, the emotions that arise are usually feelings that serve as a response to anxious thoughts. Individuals may experience emotional states such as nervousness, tension (being on edge), anxiety, and even panic. These emotional responses indicate affective distress triggered by the perception of threat formed in the previous cognitive process.

c.) Physical

Anxiety is also characterized by the emergence of physiological responses as a reaction to perceived stress or threats. These responses include sweaty palms, muscle tension, increased heart rate, and dizziness. These physical reactions occur due to the activation of the autonomic nervous system, which prepares the body to deal with dangerous situations (fight-or-flight response).

d.) Behavior

In the anxiety cycle, behaviors refer to the various ways individuals act, respond, and manage their experiences of anxiety. Individuals who experience anxiety tend to show certain behaviors as strategies to reduce feelings of discomfort. These behaviors include avoiding situations that

trigger anxiety, leaving situations when anxiety begins to arise, trying to control everything excessively, and performing certain actions to gain a sense of security. Although these behaviors can provide temporary relief, they have the potential to prolong the cycle of anxiety in the long term.

4. Tiktok as Online Discourse for Emotional Self-Expression

In recent years, social media platforms have become alternative spaces for students to express their academic and emotional experiences, including those related to academic anxiety. TikTok, in particular, provides a multimodal space for users to express themselves through a combination of various modes, such as visual, auditory, text, and performative modes within a short video format (Grzenkiewicz & Wildfeuer, 2025). Through features such as captions, voice-overs, filters, and background music, TikTok enables users to creatively convey emotions, thoughts, and personal experiences. As Bhandari and Bimo (2022) point out, the platform's design and algorithmic features shape how individuals construct meaning and express themselves in their everyday interactions.

For students, TikTok often serves as a means of emotional release and self-expression. Surabhi et al. (2022) shows that TikTok offers a wide variety of emotionally expressive content that reinforces the platform's role as a space for open and inclusive emotional communication. In academic contexts, feelings such as stress, fatigue, and writing anxiety are frequently expressed through relatable, humorous, or personal confessional posts. This practice of sharing helps normalize emotional experiences and provides social validation, fostering a sense of community among users who face similar challenges. Zheluk et al. (2022) also found out that TikTok content about adolescent anxiety often contains humor and self-disclosure, functioning as a coping space that allows students to relieve academic stress and express their anxious feelings through creative forms. Therefore, TikTok serves as a digital platform that transforms

personal emotions such as academic anxiety into creative, expressive, and socially meaningful narratives.

5. Systemic Functional Linguistics

Systemic Functional Linguistics is a theory that focuses on the use of grammar. The relationship between language and its social functions (situations and culture), or in this context referred as Functional grammar, that treats grammar as a source that creates meaning and focuses on the relationship between form and meaning. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the model of grammar should be as rich as the grammar itself because functional grammar is complex in making and understanding meaning. Therefore, it can be understood that Functional Grammar focuses on analyzing the meaning of a text.

Within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), language functions through three main metafunctions: Ideational Metafunction (language to represent experiences), Interpersonal Metafunction (language to build social relationships), and Textual Metafunction (language to organize messages). One of the analytical tools in the ideational metafunction is transitivity, a set of linguistic choices used by speakers to encode experiences about the external world and the internal world, including consciousness, thoughts, and feelings, through the involvement of participants, processes, and circumstances in a clause. Transitivity is the main system for interpreting the meaning of experiences because it allows analysis of how an event is represented through the type of process in the clause structure.

In the transitivity system, the meaning of experience is conveyed through three main components, namely process, participant, and circumstance. Process refers to the type of activity or event represented in the clause. Process indicates what is happening. Participant is the party or entity involved in a process. Participants can be individuals, groups, or

abstract concepts that play a role in the process. Circumstance provides additional information about the process, such as the time, place, manner, reason, or conditions under which an event occurred.

Figure 2. *Process types, their meanings, and characteristic participants*

(Adapted from Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 311)

Process type	Category meaning	Participants, directly involved	Participants, obliquely involved
Material: Action Event	'doing' 'doing' 'happening'	Actor, Goal	Recipient, Client; Scope; Initiator; Attribute
Behavioural	'behaving'	Behaver	Behaviour
Mental: Perception Cognition Desideration Emotion	'sensing' 'seeing' 'thinking' 'wanting' 'feeling'	Senser, Phenomenon	Inducer
Verbal	'saying'	Sayer, Target	Receiver; Verbiage
Relational: Attribution Identification	'being' 'attributing' 'identifying'	Carrier, Attribute Identified, Identifier; Token, Value	Attributor, Beneficiary Assigner
Existential	'existing'	Existent	

Halliday classifies processes into six types, namely material processes (physical actions), mental processes (cognitive processes, perceptions, and emotions), relational processes (relationships between identities or attributes), behavioral processes, verbal processes, and existential processes. In this study, transitivity analysis is used to identify how experiences of anxiety are represented verbally in the text. The selection of process types in clauses shows how individuals position themselves in relation to their academic experiences.

6. Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) provides a valuable analytical framework for explaining how meaning is constructed through the interaction of multiple modes in digital communication. It is an approach used to understand how communication occurs simultaneously through visual, verbal, audio, and performative elements. This approach is

particularly relevant in the context of social media, where various modes coexist and interact to create meaning. Based on the theories of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), MDA emphasizes that meaning is not only generated solely verbal text but through the complex interplay among different modes. The concept of multimodality refers to the use of more than one semiotic mode in communication, while semiotic resources are the tools such as images, sounds, gestures, emojis, and text used to construct and convey meaning.

Social media platforms, particularly TikTok, are highly suitable for analysis through the MDA approach because communication on these platforms is inherently multimodal. TikTok users rely not only on textual captions but also on gestures, facial expressions, emojis, sounds, and background music, which interact dynamically to form layered meanings and specific social contexts (Muchitsch, 2024). Therefore, MDA offers a very suitable framework for examining how meanings on Tiktok are produced, negotiated, and interpreted through these interrelated semiotic resources.

From the MDA perspective, meaning emerges from the relationships among various modes within particular social and cultural contexts. These contexts influence how modes are perceived, represented, and understood by users (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). Consequently, applying MDA is crucial for analyzing social phenomena embedded in digital discourse such as academic anxiety, as it allows for a deeper understanding of how students visually and verbally express their emotional experiences in multimodal environments like TikTok.

This study employs the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) framework as an analytical tool to examine at how students use TikTok post to express their anxiety about academic anxiety. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), meaning in discourse is created through the

interaction of multiple semiotic modes that can be broadly categorized into verbal and non-verbal resources. These modes work together to form a cohesive semiotic ensemble through which meaning is constructed, represented, and negotiated within social contexts. Consequently, MDA enables this study to explore how meanings related academic anxiety are constructed, represented and negotiated within social media contexts through a combination of linguistic and non-linguistic resources.

The analysis in this study focuses on two primary aspects; verbal and non-verbal modes. Each mode contributing distinct semiotic features to the representation of academic anxiety:

1) Verbal Mode

The verbal mode includes captions, on-screen texts, subtitles, and spoken narration. These elements are analyzed in terms of lexical choice, tone, and syntactic structure to identify how students linguistically express emotions such as fear, stress, or frustration. Emotive expressions like “my brain stopped working” or “I can’t write anymore,” repetitions, and code-switching are treated as linguistic markers of anxiety. Additionally, emoticons and emojis are considered extensions of textual meaning, visualized linguistic cues that heighten the emotional intensity of the message (Simungala et al., 2024).

2) Non-Verbal Mode

The non-verbal mode encompasses visual, audio, and performative elements that interact dynamically to construct affective

meaning. The visual grammar is examined through three metafunctions:

- a) Representational metafunction: explores what is visually depicted and how students represent anxiety through gestures, symbolic objects (e.g., laptops, papers, messy desks), or movement.
- b) Interactional metafunction: examines gaze direction, facial expression, and camera angle to interpret emotional engagement with viewers, whether inviting empathy (demand gaze) or depicting experience (offer gaze).
- c) Compositional metafunction: analyzes framing, lighting, and spatial arrangement to determine how visual balance and focus contribute to meaning construction.

In addition to static visuals, audio and performative features such as background music, intonation, movement, and editing rhythm are treated as affective resources within this non-verbal mode. Sound and music on TikTok serve as affective semiotic resources that communicate emotions, shape audience perception, and construct social meanings (Muchitsch, 2024). Sighs, laughter masking nervousness, or melancholic background music amplify the representation of anxiety, while camera movements and gestures externalize the embodied experience of academic pressure.

7. Systemic-Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA)

Systemic Functional–Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) is an integrated analytical framework that combines Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to examine how meaning is constructed through textual and visual elements from two selected units. While SFL focuses on how meaning is realized through language, MDA extends this perspective by analyzing how meaning is also constructed through visual and performative modes. Therefore, SF-MDA

provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing meaning-making processes in multimodal communication, particularly in digital platforms such as TikTok.

In this study, Systemic Functional–Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) is employed to analyze how students represent academic anxiety in TikTok post through both linguistic and multimodal features. From the Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective, the analysis focuses on transitivity as part of the ideational metafunction, which examines how experiences of anxiety are represented through process types, participants, and circumstances in verbal texts. As explained in the previous section, transitivity serves as the main system for interpreting experiential meaning. Therefore, this study uses transitivity analysis to identify how students verbally construct their experiences of academic anxiety in on-screen texts.

Meanwhile, from the Multimodal Discourse Analysis perspective, the analysis focuses on non-verbal modes, including visual and performative elements. These include gestures, facial expressions, gaze, camera angle, symbolic objects, which function as affective semiotic resources in representing anxiety. This integrated approach is particularly suitable for analyzing TikTok content, where meaning emerges from the dynamic interaction of multiple semiotic resources within specific social and cultural contexts. Therefore, SF-MDA provides a comprehensive analytical framework to examine how students express and negotiate their experiences of academic anxiety in multimodal digital environments.

B. Study of the Relevant Research

A number of previous studies have explored academic anxiety, highlighting its underlying factors and its influence on learners' writing behavior and achievement. These studies are reviewed in the following order:

Yenti and Susanti (2025) investigated the various forms of writing anxiety

among English Department students in an academic writing course in order to understand EFL learners' experience and respond to academic writing tasks. Their study found that cognitive anxiety was the most prevalent type, reflecting students' persistent fear of receiving poor grades and being negatively judged by others. This finding underscores the importance of self-efficacy in shaping students' emotional responses and engagement with writing activities. Accordingly, Sasferi (2022) emphasized that higher levels of academic self-efficacy help students regulate anxiety and maintain motivation throughout the writing process.

In the context of EFL undergraduate students, several studies have also examined how writing anxiety is manifested in actual writing situations. Sabti et al. (2024), employing Cheng's Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), investigated the effects of cognitive, somatic, and avoidance behavior anxiety on Iraqi EFL learners' attitudes toward writing. The study revealed that avoidance behavior anxiety was the most dominant, indicating students' tendency to evade writing tasks due to linguistic difficulties and low self-confidence. Similarly, Shobari et al. (2025), using a qualitative approach adapted from the SLWAI framework, identified fear, self-confidence issues, and supervisory pressure as major internal factors contributing to thesis writing anxiety among Indonesian undergraduates. Both studies highlight that EFL students' writing anxiety often manifests through avoidance and emotional distress, suggesting that inadequate self-efficacy and linguistic competence continue to play a significant role in shaping their writing experiences.

While these studies have provided valuable insights into the psychological and behavioral dimensions of academic anxiety, they primarily relied on traditional data sources such as questionnaires and interviews. However, with the emergence of social media platforms like TikTok, students have begun to express their academic and emotional experiences more openly in digital spaces. For this reason, TikTok has gained academic significance as a digital space where individuals can externalize and negotiate their emotional and academic experiences, including those related to writing and learning. Omar and Dequan (2020) identified self-

expression, social interaction, and escapism as key motivations driving users' engagement with TikTok, highlighting its participatory nature in user-generated content. Similarly, Ramsden and Talbot (2025) found that university students used TikTok to relieve academic stress, share emotional experiences, and seek peer support, although excessive use occasionally led to negative social comparisons. Beyond its entertainment value, TikTok has also been conceptualized as a multimodal space where users negotiate emotions and identities through sound, visuals, and text.

Given that TikTok users communicate their experiences through the interplay of language, visuals, and sound, understanding how meaning and emotion are constructed within such digital texts requires a multimodal analytical perspective. Several studies have applied Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to explore how meaning, emotion, and representation are constructed across social media content. Zahra et al. (2024) examined the representation of women in Instagram Reels through Kress and van Leeuwen's framework, revealing how visual and textual elements interact to portray both empowerment and femininity. Similar to this, Amalia and Suhandono (2023) analyzed verbal and visual cues in gender-based harassment tweets, demonstrating how multimodal elements work together to reinforce symbolic violence against women. These studies illustrate how MDA serves as an effective analytical lens for revealing the interplay among language, imagery, and emotion in online discourse. However, academic emotions such as academic anxiety have received minimal attention within digital multimodal contexts like TikTok, despite prior research effectively analyzing social and emotional representations across platforms. Therefore, this study adopts a multimodal lens to investigate the representation of academic anxiety as expressed through verbal and visual modes on TikTok.