

English Writing Anxiety, Writing Strategies and Writing Self-efficacy of Chinese College English Majors

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Abstract: The study tried to explore the relationship among English writing anxiety, writing strategies and writing self-efficacy of English majors from the educational and psychological point of view. In the survey research, respondents answered through the adopted questionnaires, and a total of 401 English majors from Anhui Xinhua University were involved in the study. Results showed that English writing anxiety, writing strategies and writing self-efficacy of English majors are significantly correlative. The study revealed that the anxiety level of English majors stays at a medium or low level, as well as the English writing strategies usage and writing self-efficacy. In terms of relationship of these three variables, the more English majors experienced writing anxiety, the better they employed the writing strategies and the higher experienced writing self-efficacy. In addition, the better the writing strategies applied in writing, the better are the writing self-efficacy. Therefore, an English writing curriculum enhancement plan was put forward to help English majors to improve their employment of English writing strategies, so that their writing ability and critical thinking ability will be enhanced eventually.

1. Introduction

There are five fundamental language learning skills, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating, while English writing ability is an output skill, which requires learners to have sufficient input and skill training as the basis for ability development. It reflects learners' comprehensive language ability in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. For a long time, writing activity, which is a compulsory part of the second foreign language learning, has been one of the important components in English learning. However, English writing skills are not easily mastered by learners. To some extent, improvement in writing skills and writing production are affected by the individual's growth environment. Different daily life experiences bring different effects on emotional experience among different learners. Different psychological states affect the way students look at things, and even affect their writing behaviors and it is no doubt that these psychological factors all have an impact on English writing. Among these influential factors, the most prominent ones are anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, and emotions, which affect people's behaviors, hinder or promote learners' learning, and thus affect the process of second language

acquisition.

Due to the limited teaching methods, students find it difficult to issue effective commands for the writing activity, and do not understand the regulating effect of appropriate writing strategies on their anxiety levels, which makes it difficult to improve their writing scores. At the same time, most students' writing skills are insufficient to support them in achieving high writing scores, and the low rewards make them feel low self-efficacy, resulting in negative psychology towards writing activities and a lack of confidence in their ability to achieve high scores.

Therefore, this current study takes English majors as the research subject, and uses questionnaires to explore the situations of the subjects' anxiety in English writing, writing self-efficacy, and use of writing strategies at this stage. This study also investigates the relationship between these variables. Based on the research outcome, some educational suggestions for the current English writing teaching will be put forward and it is hoped to provide some certain teaching theoretical and practical help for English teachers in universities.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. English Writing Anxiety

Writing anxiety refers to the anxiety learners experience when engaging in writing activities, manifested through behaviors such as procrastination or avoidance of writing activities. As a productive language skill, English writing is both a foreign language skill and a second language skill for Chinese learners. In this situation, students face many unknown obstacles when writing. In English language teaching, learners' writing abilities vary, and English writing anxiety is one of the obstacles most learners encounter when engaging in English writing activities. Some students even describe English writing as an "unpleasant, punitive, and even terrifying experience" [1]. Compared with native language writers, foreign language learners are more likely to experience anxiety when engaging in writing activities.

2.2. Writing Strategies

In English teaching in China, writing is a language activity that students need to experience, and it is also a language skill that they must master. However, the mastery of skills is inseparable from the guidance of strategies. In order to complete writing tasks with high quality, learners often adopt certain methods [2], that is, writing strategies. Writing strategy is a method to guide learners in expressing ideas and revising essays. Throughout the writing process, learners will consciously or unconsciously reflect their use of writing strategies, which will directly influence students' writing behavior and writing quality. Choosing the right writing strategy can help learners achieve their English learning goals in the process of English writing [3].

2.3. Writing self-efficacy

Writing is a complex output in language activities, and the learner's own emotional factors will have an important impact on the writing process. Among them, self-efficacy is one of the important parts of individual emotional factors [4]. Bandura's (1997) research on self-efficacy has aroused great attention from scholars all over the world, and some scholars have turned their attention to writing self-efficacy [5]. Writing self-efficacy is developed from the concept of self-efficacy, which is the actual embodiment of self-efficacy in English writing environment.

This research defines writing self-efficacy as a kind of self-confidence that learners can complete writing tasks smoothly with high quality and believe that they have and are able to use writing skills.

This self-confidence can effectively regulate learners' writing activities. As to the classification of writing self-efficacy, Shell et al. (1989) divided writing self-efficacy into two aspects ---- writing task and writing skill [6].

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

The study aimed to analyze the relationships among writing anxiety, writing strategies, and writing self-efficacy and provides feasible teaching suggestions for English writing teaching. Therefore, in this study, the researcher used the descriptive research design to conduct the study.

3.2. Participants

The target respondents of the study were 401 English majors from School of Foreign Language Studies, Anhui Xinhua University, Anhui province. From a total number of 401, 273 are sophomore-year students, 90 are junior-year students, and 38 are freshman-year students in School of Foreign Language Studies, Anhui Xinhua University.

3.3. Instruments

This study adopts the English Writing Anxiety Scale (17 items), the English Writing Strategy Questionnaire (22 items), the English Writing Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (18 items), SPSS26.0 as research tools to explore the relationship of these variables.

As reflected in the result, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the three sub-scales of writing anxiety were 0.713, 0.772, and 0.747, respectively, all greater than 0.7, which showed that the reliability result is acceptable for this scale. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the four subscales of English writing strategies were 0.804, 0.821, 0.724, and 0.764, with reliability results of good and acceptable. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the two subscales of writing self-efficacy was 0.895 and 0.838, with a verbal description of good.

From the reliability result, it could be seen that in the pilot testing stage, the test result of English writing anxiety, writing strategies, and writing self-efficacy of English majors in China was reliable and consistent.

3.4. Procedure

Data were gathered by administering an online survey through Wen Juanxing. The link to the online questionnaire was sent directly to the personal email of the respondents whom the researcher knows. The questionnaire before the actual data gathering was validated by consulting experts and by conducting the pilot test. It was done to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument.

3.5. Data Analysis

After the data were collected, each questionnaire was examined individually. The data for the 401 usable questionnaires were coded for statistical analysis to answer the research questions. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used for the statistical analysis of the data.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Relationship between English Writing Anxiety and Writing Strategies

Table 1: Relationship between English Writing Anxiety and Writing Strategies

Somatic Anxiety	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Metacognitive Strategies	.303**	0.000	Highly Significant
Cognitive Strategies	.310**	0.000	Highly Significant
Social Strategies	.401**	0.000	Highly Significant
Self-Monitoring Strategies	.291**	0.000	Highly Significant
Avoidance Anxiety			
Metacognitive Strategies	.236**	0.000	Highly Significant
Cognitive Strategies	.328**	0.000	Highly Significant
Social Strategies	.410**	0.000	Highly Significant
Self-Monitoring Strategies	.272**	0.000	Highly Significant
Cognitive Anxiety			
Metacognitive Strategies	.352**	0.000	Highly Significant
Cognitive Strategies	.354**	0.000	Highly Significant
Social Strategies	.393**	0.000	Highly Significant
Self-Monitoring Strategies	.306**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

It can be gleaned from the table 1 that the computed r-values indicates a moderate direct correlation and the resulted p-values were less than the alpha level. This means that there was significant relationship found and implies that the more that the respondents experienced writing anxiety, the better are the strategies they employed.

Use of English writing strategies is also affected by emotional factors, especially anxiety [7]. Facts have proved that there are certain differences in the writing strategies chosen by learners with mild anxiety and learners with severe anxiety when pursuing to solve writing problems [8].

When learners' learning anxiety is high, negative thoughts may be followed, and these worrying thoughts may interfere with attention, block task information, and reduce cognitive resources for fulfilment of task [9]. In contrast, learners with low anxiety, whose resources were not exhausted in this way, instead strategies are used to solve problems. However, learners with high anxiety may need to cope with anxiety-induced discomfort, so strategies are less helpful to them [10]. Other studies have also shown that anxiety may affect learners' motivation to choose and use learning strategies. That is to say, anxiety can cause learners to reduce or not employ certain learning strategies to a certain extent. In addition, students who experience less anxiety are more likely to use strategies actively; hence, learners using different learning strategies can reduce the likelihood of anxiety.

In addition, through research on the English writing anxiety, the use of writing strategies and their correlations of English majors, it is found that English majors will have a moderate degree of anxiety when writing, and they will use pre-writing strategies more frequently, and then followed by post-writing revision strategies, but rarely use strategies in their writing process. Therefore, it is can be found that sometimes English majors don't employ writing strategies in their writing because they have low anxiety to some extent.

In this current study, it is concluded that the higher the anxiety of respondents, the better they can use writing strategies. In other words, the more that the respondents experienced writing anxiety, the better are the strategies they employed. To some extent, this finding can be attributed to the fact

that when learners experience certain negative emotion, their awareness of effort will be stimulated, and they will be more engaged in learning activities than learners with low anxiety [11]. As Zhang Kai et al. (2021) pointed out, the positive effects of "the awareness of effort" inspired by anxiety may coexist with and neutralize the negative effects of anxiety, making the negative effects of anxiety no longer significant [12]. Therefore, only when learners have experienced changeable and dynamic transfer of negative and positive emotions can they have more psychological resilience, and thus adopt more learning strategies to achieve "the awareness of effort" in language learning and writing. Therefore, the current research confirms that anxiety has a negative impact on foreign language learning, but it has a positive effect as well. Instructors need to guide learners well in order to achieve the cultivation of students' positive emotions and ultimately promote the improvement of their English language ability and writing ability.

4.2. Relationship between English Writing Anxiety and Writing Self-efficacy

Table 2: Relationship between English Writing Anxiety and Writing Self-efficacy

Somatic Anxiety	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Writing skill self-efficacy	.321**	0.000	Highly Significant
Writing task self-efficacy	.334**	0.000	Highly Significant
Avoidance Anxiety			
Writing skill self-efficacy	.366**	0.000	Highly Significant
Writing task self-efficacy	.362**	0.000	Highly Significant
Cognitive Anxiety			
Writing skill self-efficacy	.297**	0.000	Highly Significant
Writing task self-efficacy	.310**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

Table 2 displays the association between writing anxiety and self-efficacy. It was observed that the computed r-values indicates a moderate direct correlation and the resulted p-values were less than the alpha level. This means that there was significant relationship found and reveals that the more that the respondents experienced writing anxiety, the higher are the writing self-efficacy.

Writing self-efficacy will be affected by other factors, and will also affect other factors to a certain extent. For example, writing strategies, writing performance, gender differences, writing tasks and other factors will affect learners' writing self-efficacy.

In English writing teaching, two influential factors, writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy, have attracted extensive attention of researchers. Many scholars have researched and discussed the relationship between writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy of college students with different language backgrounds [13, 14]. Through a series of studies, it is concluded that in the context of second language learning, students' writing anxiety is closely related to their writing self-efficacy, and the two are negatively correlated [15].

On the other hand, it will happen to encounter the different situation. This current study found the more that the respondents experienced writing anxiety, the higher are the writing self-efficacy. Usher and Pajares (2008) pointed that the higher the writing anxiety, the higher the self-efficacy [16]. That is to say, in the process of second language acquisition, whether learners can correctly judge their own writing ability and whether they believe that they have completed the writing task will affect the degree of anxiety they experience during the writing process.

In addition, Salem et al. (2014) first showed that gender factors have a certain impact on English writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy [17]. The research results showed that there was a negative correlation between boys' writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy, while the correlation between girls' writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy was not significant. Therefore, it is possible to find

the relationship between English writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy is varied according to different influential factors.

4.3. Relationship between English Writing Strategies and Writing Self-efficacy

Table 3: Relationship between English Writing Strategies and Writing Self-efficacy

Metacognitive Strategies	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Writing skill self-efficacy	.592**	0.000	Highly Significant
Writing task self-efficacy	.568**	0.000	Highly Significant
Cognitive Strategies			
Writing skill self-efficacy	.687**	0.000	Highly Significant
Writing task self-efficacy	.652**	0.000	Highly Significant
Social Strategies			
Writing skill self-efficacy	.608**	0.000	Highly Significant
Writing task self-efficacy	.600**	0.000	Highly Significant
Self-Monitoring Strategies			
Writing skill self-efficacy	.682**	0.000	Highly Significant
Writing task self-efficacy	.633**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

Table 3 presents the association between writing strategies and self-efficacy. It was observed that the computed r-values indicates a moderate direct correlation and the resulted p-values were less than the alpha level. This means that there was significant relationship exists and indicates that the better the strategies applied in writing, the higher are the writing self-efficacy.

Writing self-efficacy will be affected by many factors. Some researchers found that in English writing, students with higher self-confidence will use writing strategies more frequently [18]. This not only shows that the use of writing strategies is closely related to writing self-efficacy, but also confirms the conclusion that there is a positive correlation between the two. In other words, learners with a strong sense of writing self-efficacy are more likely to use writing strategies and have a stronger sense of strategy in writing, indicating that writing strategies have a positive effect on students' writing self-efficacy [15].

Some researchers believe that in writing teaching, teachers can effectively improve students' self-efficacy by teaching them cognitive strategies after certain planning [19]. Based on subdividing the categories of writing strategies, some scholars conducted in-depth research and pointed out that students with strong self-efficacy are more inclined to use cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies in writing than other learners. In other words, those students who have received systematic writing strategy training will be able to plan their writing activities more clearly than students who have not received training, so their writing self-efficacy is higher [20]. The results of this survey are consistent with the results of Schunk et al., who believed that self-efficacy can effectively predict the frequency of learners' use of writing strategies, and the relationship between the two is reciprocal. In addition, only when learners insist on timely feedback can teachers' teaching of writing strategies be effective; otherwise, learners will not persist in using strategies [21].

Therefore, in English writing teaching, if teachers want to effectively improve learners' English writing ability, they must focus on specific strategies in writing strategies and specific aspects of writing self-efficacy [22].

5. Conclusion

The study provides a deeper understanding of English writing anxiety, writing strategies, and writing self-efficacy among Chinese college English majors, as well as empirical evidence for the close relationship between these variables. There was significant relationship between English writing anxiety and writing strategies, which can be found that the more that the respondents experienced writing anxiety, the better are the strategies they employed. The association between writing anxiety and self-efficacy is closely related, and revealed that when the respondents experienced more writing anxiety, they may have higher writing self-efficacy. What's more, writing strategies and self-efficacy are significantly correlated, which indicates that the better the strategies applied in writing by respondents, the higher are the writing self-efficacy of them.

Considering that the employment of writing strategies by respondents is not satisfactory, instructors could highlight students' writing strategies in teaching, especially in the aspects of metacognitive strategies and cognitive strategies. On the other hand, instructor might continuously encourage students to develop social strategies and self-monitoring strategies.

The result showed that English writing anxiety, writing strategies and writing self-efficacy are all significantly correlated with each other, indicating that the combination of the three can effectively promote the improvement of students' writing level and the cultivation of thinking ability. However, the path of how the three variables interact with each other needs to be further explored through the follow research in order to clarify the intermediary role between variables so as to better serve teaching and learning. In addition, future study may broaden the range of the respondents in quantity and scope to ensure the diversity and representation of research findings. Also, they may verify the difference of English writing anxiety, writing strategies and writing self-efficacy in terms of sex.

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