

Research on How Foreign Language Writing Anxiety Affects Chinese Ninth-Grade Students' English Practical Writing Quality

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Abstract: Writing anxiety is common in language learning and is an essential factor leading to successful study. Ninth-grade students are facing the challenges of the high school entrance exam and suffering from anxiety. This study intends to investigate how students in North China's ninth grade who are experiencing writing anxiety related to foreign languages affect the caliber of their English practical writing. In this study, questionnaires and essay topics were distributed to them. SPSS was used to evaluate and measure the experimental process and results. The results show that ninth-grade pupils' moderate degree of writing anxiety is mostly caused by exam pressure. Higher anxiety levels in students are typically associated with less accurate writing. Writing complexity and fluency show no significant relation to writing anxiety. Finally, this study provides insights for English educators, enabling them to focus on key teaching points. Moreover, it provides ideas for students to lessen their nervousness when writing and enhance their output.

Keywords: Practical writing anxiety, Writing quality, Ninth-grade students.

1. Introduction

Anxiety is one of the psychological and emotional characteristics of language learners, being an essential factor that leads to successful study. One of the most significant forms of anxiety related to learning a foreign language is writing anxiety, which is common when learning English. Writing anxiety refers to the cognitive anxiety, physical anxiety, and avoidance behaviors of students in the process of writing. Cognitive anxiety refers to the anxiety that students suffer from when they feel unable to meet the expectations of their teachers or themselves, as well as the fear of failure. Physical anxiety magnifies as negative physiological symptoms arise when students are confronted with writing tasks. Avoidance behavior is characterized by students' tendency to procrastinate or avoid assignments given by their teachers [1]. Writing anxiety has influenced second language learning in many aspects. Writing scores and techniques are the focus of the majority of research on the impact of L2 writing anxiety. Writing anxiety correlates negatively with academic performance, meaning that students are expected to have a greater cognitive load and worse writing skills as measured by grades in proportion to their level of worry [2]. They may experience a heavier cognitive burden when completing what they perceive as problematic compared to when completing more straightforward tasks, which can affect their writing performance [3]. What is

more, the application of strategy has been impacted by writing anxiety. Research states that writing anxiety significantly impairs one's ability to comprehend, interpret, and translate graphics when in chart writing [4]. However, there hasn't been much research done recently on how anxiety affects middle school students' writing quality.

The evaluation indicators for writing quality are accuracy, fluency, and complexity [5]. In recent years, as for writing quality, the majority of studies has been on how instructional strategies affect the production of high-quality language.

Collaborative writing models are beneficial for improving writing quality [6]. Dynamic assessment of the writing teaching model with peer evaluation as a variable can significantly improve students' writing level and text quality [7]. Given this, studies on how emotional elements affect writing quality are scarce. The impact of writing anxiety on middle school students' accuracy, fluency, and complexity of practical writing is the main topic of this study.

Writing performance is impacted by writing anxiety, which also has an effect on writing accuracy, fluency, and complexity. Compulsory Education, English Curriculum Standards, suggest that students should keep the high initiative and motivation, stimulate interest, form a positive attitude, reduce anxiety, and increase confidence, which is conducive to a sound command of English, the cultivation of language ability, and improvement in academic performance [8]. However, Ninth-grade students facing the stress of the high school admission exam experience a significant increase in English writing anxiety. Overwhelming anxiety may have an effect on students' emotional health, ability to study, and application of learning methodologies, all of which may have an effect on test scores. It serves as a reminder to English teachers of senior high school students to be aware of their students' psychological states and to adapt their writing classes appropriately to suit their anxiety levels. It also provides insights for teachers to accurately grasp the key points of instruction, control the way assignments are given, and offer constructive feedback to different students in appropriate ways. For junior high school students, it provides new ideas on how to use appropriate learning strategies when facing the high school entrance examination, adjust to form a positive and healthy mental state, and reduce psychological pressure and anxiety.

2. Research Design

2.1. Research Subjects

The students are from a junior high school in Northern China. The 84 kids come from two natural classrooms taught by the same English teacher, with 54 guys and 30 girls.

2.2. Research Instruments

In this study, third-year junior high school students' levels and reasons for writing anxiety related to foreign languages are examined. This study uses questionnaires and testing methods to examine ninth-grade students' practical writing anxiety levels in Northern China. It looks at the underlying causes of this worry, which gives us a better knowledge of the reasons influencing their difficulties with language acquisition. It collects and analyzes students' practical writing texts using Lu's syntactic complexity analyzer to assess sentence complexity and fluency and employs Grammarly and manual analysis to evaluate sentence accuracy. Lastly, SPSS is used to examine correlations and regressions to determine how writing anxiety affects the fluency, correctness, and complexity of English practical writing.

2.2.1. The Questionnaires

This study used the Second Language Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) to assess students' anxiety levels, comprising 22 items [9]. Physical anxiety is represented by items two, six, eight, eleven, thirteen, fifteen, and nineteen. Avoidance behavior is assessed through items four, five, ten, twelve, sixteen, eighteen, and twenty-two. Cognitive anxiety is measured by items one, three, seven, nine, fourteen, seventeen, twenty, and twenty-one. These categories help differentiate the various dimensions of anxiety in the study. Each item has five options. This Likert-type questionnaire uses a five-point rating scale with 1 point for severely disagreeing and 5 points for strongly agreeing. In addition, in SLWAI, the scores for items one, four, seven, seventeen, eighteen, twenty-one, and twenty-two need to be scored reversely during data analysis. For example, a score of 1 becomes 5; a score of 2 becomes 4, and 3 remains unchanged. Students' anxiety scores range from 25 to 110, where higher numbers denote higher anxiety levels. This study also employed the Causes of Writing Anxiety Inventory (CWAI) [10]. This scale consists of 10 items, corresponding to ten dimensions that may lead to writing anxiety. It should be noted that to reduce student language barriers, participants received a Chinese questionnaire translated by Guo and Qin [11].

2.2.2. Writing Texts

The writing text selected for this study is a simulated essay for the high school entrance examination, and the text type is practical writing. This text is close to students' real lives, creating a meaningful context for students. For their practical composition, the students were instructed to write on "How to be a good learner." The word count should be around 80 words (the beginning provided does not count towards the total word count).

2.3. Data Collection

First, two types of surveys were distributed to a total of 84 students from two classes. Students completed the questionnaire using the software "Wenjuanxing" within ten minutes. Before distributing the questionnaire, the teacher explained the purpose of the research, saying that there was no right or incorrect response, and asked the students to fill out the responses carefully. The SLWAI and CWAI are two questionnaires that are used to measure students' anxiety levels and the causes of their distress. Regarding the SLWAI, 84 questionnaires were collected in this survey, and there were no invalid questionnaires. Regarding the CWAI, a total of 84 completed surveys were gathered for this study; no invalid surveys were found. After the questionnaires, the teacher conducted a writing exam for the students. They should complete a writing piece for the high school entrance examination within 15 minutes. The title and requirements are shown in the text above. Participants were prohibited from discussing, searching the dictionary, or using electronics. After collecting the compositions, two teachers evaluated them and analyzed their accuracy, fluency, and syntactic complexity. This analysis was conducted using both a syntactic complexity analyzer and Grammarly, ensuring a comprehensive assessment of the writing samples.

2.4. Data analysis

The text's fluency, accuracy, and complexity were analyzed according to the measurement criteria summarized by Zhu Qian [12]. This study focused solely on syntactic complexity in terms of complexity. W refers to the words; T refers to the T units; C refers to the clauses; DC refers to the subordinate clauses; E refers to the language errors; EFC refers to the error-free clause, and EFT refers to the error-free T units. The syntactic complexity of the essay is analyzed by a syntactic complexity analyzer, which evaluates it from four aspects: W/T, W/C, DC/C, and C/T. The essay's

accuracy is analyzed using both Grammarly and manual analysis from E/W, EFC/C, and EFC/T. It includes errors in grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, etc. The number of written words, clauses, and the number of T units within the specified time determines the fluency of the composition. Finally, frequency and descriptive analysis were used in the SLWAI and the CWAI using SPSS. The association and regression between writing anxiety and writing complexity, correctness, and fluency are examined in this study using SPSS.

3. Results

3.1. Analysis of SLWAI

Initially, this study used SPSS to do a reliability analysis of the SLWAI. The degree of reliability of measurement data is examined using reliability studies. The dependability coefficient in Table 1 is 0.962, which is higher than 0.9 and indicates that the research data is of extremely good quality. Validity studies are used to analyse whether the study is reasonable and meaningful. Since the KMO is higher than 0.6 at 0.923, it is possible to effectively extract the data from the information. An anxiety score of 25-53 indicates low-level anxiety, 54-82 indicates moderate anxiety, and 83-110 indicates high-level anxiety. Next, this study conducted a descriptive analysis of it. Table 2 and Figure 1 show that the distribution of students' anxiety scores ranges from 47 to 98, with the minimum anxiety score being 47 and the maximum anxiety score being 98. The average level of anxiety is 69.917. The median anxiety score is 74. The highest proportion is moderate anxiety, indicating that the majority of students who took the test had moderate practical writing anxiety.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity of the SLWAI and the CWAI.

	Items	Samples	Cronbach α	KMO
SLWAI	22	84	0.962	0.923
CWAI	10	84	0.902	0.906

Table 2: The descriptive Analysis of Anxiety Scores.

Items	N of samples	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median
Score	84	47.000	98.000	69.917	10.515	74.000

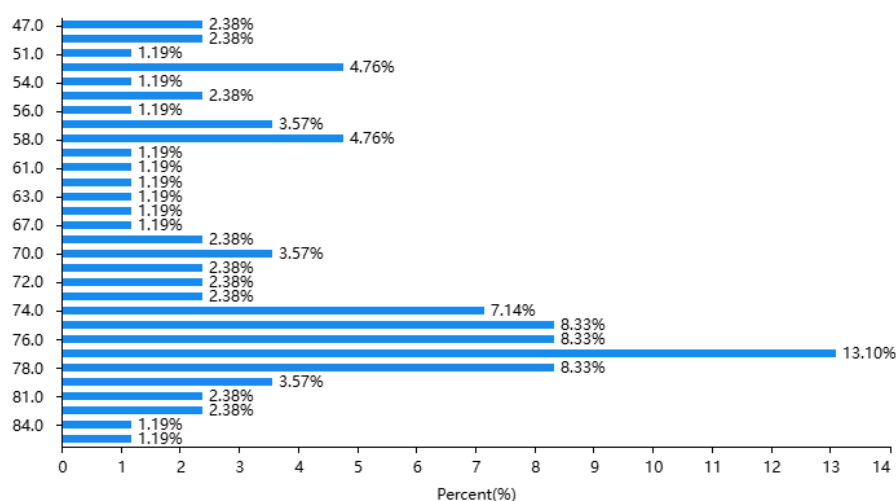


Figure 1: The Frequency Analysis of Anxiety Scores.

3.2. The Analysis of CWAI

The research data quality is quite high, as evidenced by Table 1's Cronbach α of the CWAI of 0.902, which is greater than 0.9. The research data is very suited for information extraction, showing the validity is good, as indicated by the KMO of 0.906, which is better than 0.8.

According to the descriptive analysis of the CWAI, figure 2 shows that the second item, "I am afraid of writing tests," has the highest average value of 3.9.

The first item, "I worry about negative feedback from my teacher," the third item "I lack sufficient writing practice," and the ninth item "I feel very stressed during timed writing," have an average value of 3.82. It shows that exam pressure has the greatest impact on student anxiety, followed by negative evaluations, lack of practice, and timed writing. Based on the frequency analysis of the CWAI, item 1 shows a relatively high occurrence of "4.0" and "5.0", accounting for 39.29% and 36.90%, respectively. As for item 3, over 40% of the samples are "4.0". Additionally, the proportion of "5.0" is 30.95%. For item 9, "4.0" has the highest proportion of "4.0", accounting for 45.24%. It is evident that the majority of pupils feel quite anxious in these kinds of circumstances.

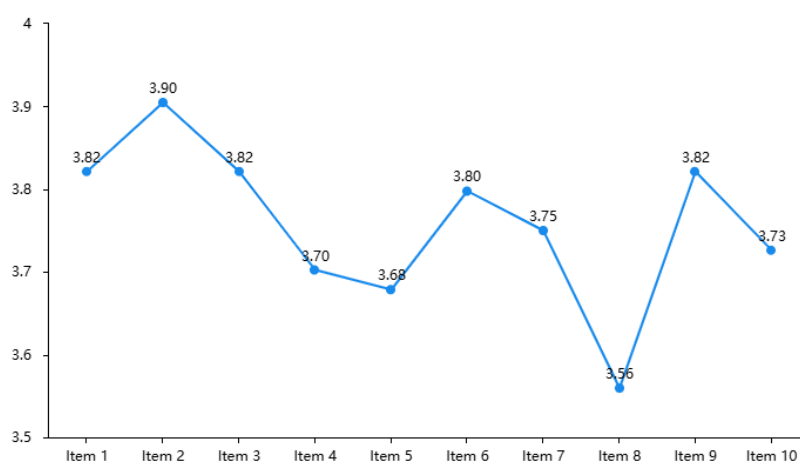


Figure 2: The Descriptive Analysis of the CWAI.

3.3. Writing Anxiety and Writing Accuracy

When examining the connection between writing anxiety and E/W, the anxiety score positively impacts E/W, with the regression coefficient being 0.006 ($t=4.784$, $p=0.000<0.01$). In a linear regression analysis with the total anxiety score as the dependent variable and E/W as the independent variable, the model's R-squared value is 0.218, indicating that the overall anxiety score can account for 21.8% of the variation in E/W.

In analyzing the relationship between writing anxiety and EFT/T, the anxiety score negatively impacts EFT/T, with the regression coefficient being -0.007 ($t = -4.996$, $p = 0.000 < 0.01$). For a linear regression analysis with the overall anxiety score as the dependent variable and EFT/T as the independent variable, the model's R-squared value is 0.233, indicating that the total anxiety score can account for 23.3% of the variation in EFT/T.

In the relationship between writing anxiety and EFC/C, the anxiety score has a significant negative impact on EFC/C, with the regression coefficient being -0.007 ($t = -4.967$, $p = 0.000 < 0.01$). In a linear regression analysis, the total anxiety score is the independent variable, and EFC/C is the dependent variable. The model's R-squared value is 0.231, indicating that the overall anxiety score can explain 23.1% of the variation in EFC/C.

Table 3: The Regression Analysis of Writing Anxiety and Writing Accuracy.

	Pearson	R ²
E/W	0.006	0.218
EFT/T	-0.007	0.233
EFC/C	-0.007	0.231

3.4. Writing Anxiety and Complexity

The total anxiety score and MLT do not significantly correlate, with correlation coefficients of 0.141, all of which are close to 0. P is greater than 0.05, indicating no relationship between MLT and the anxiety score. With a correlation coefficient of 0.216, MLC and the anxiety score are significantly correlated. Furthermore, a positive association between MLC and the anxiety associated with practical writing is indicated by the correlation coefficient, which is greater than 0. With correlation values of 0.056, all near zero, there is no discernible relationship between DC/T and the anxiety score. The fact that all of the P-values are higher than 0.05 suggests that there is no connection between DC/T and the anxiety score. The correlation coefficients between C/T and the anxiety score are very near to 0, indicating that there is no meaningful relationship between them. There is no correlation between C/T and the anxiety score since P is bigger than 0.05. Therefore, writing anxiety can affect the MLC of essays. In a linear regression study with the anxiety score as the dependent variable and MLC as the independent variable, the model's R-squared value is 0.047, indicating that the total anxiety score may account for 4.7% of the variation in MLC.

3.5. Writing Anxiety and Writing Fluency

Correlation analysis is used in this study to look at the relationship between W, C, and T and the anxiety score. Pearson correlation coefficients are used to show how strong the correlations are. W and the anxiety score do not significantly correlate, with correlation values of 0.066 near zero. Since all of the P-values are higher than 0.05, no connection was found between W and the overall anxiety score.

There is no significant correlation between C and the total anxiety score, with correlation coefficients of -0.068, close to 0. P-values are all greater than 0.05, indicating no relationship

between C and the total anxiety score. There is no significant correlation between T and the anxiety score, with correlation coefficients of -0.171, close to 0. P-values are all greater than 0.05, indicating no relationship between T and the total anxiety score. Therefore, the level of anxiety is unrelated to writing fluency.

4. Conclusion

The result of SLWAI indicates that ninth-grade students feature a moderate level of practical writing anxiety. According to the results of the CWAI, exam pressure is the factor that causes students to feel the most anxious, followed by poor grades, insufficient practice, and timed writing. Firstly, under the stress of the final exam, ninth-grade students are immersed in a tense learning atmosphere. The school conducts multiple mock exams in the daily learning process, leading to intense competition among classmates and tremendous study pressure. Therefore, teachers should not put too much pressure on students. They should provide students with the right psychological cues and use appropriate teaching methods to create an enjoyable atmosphere and reduce students' anxiety about writing. Secondly, students fear negative evaluations from teachers. This is because one of the ordinary teacher feedback methods is face-to-face discussions. This approach features the dominant position of the teacher, which puts much pressure on students. Therefore, teachers should enhance their evaluation methods by incorporating student self-assessment and peer assessment within groups, fostering collaborative learning, and cultivating an equitable, relaxed, and engaging learning environment. Furthermore, the lack of practice in daily studies is one of the reasons for anxiety. This is due to the pressure of the third year of junior high school, where teachers often prioritize memorizing essay templates to boost writing scores. As a result, students focus on rote learning rather than developing authentic writing skills through practice and technique. Students are only required to write essays during exams and have little practice in writing outside of class.

Therefore, teachers should emphasize writing in daily learning, assign relevant writing exercises, and provide feedback to improve students' writing skills. Finally, time-limited writing is also one of the reasons that causes anxiety. This is because the essay is positioned as the last question in the exam, and some students spend too much time on the previous questions and have very little time to write the essay, which increases their writing anxiety. Therefore, teachers should guide students to manage their time effectively, leaving enough time for writing by increasing their proficiency in previous reading and multiple-choice questions.

Writing anxiety affects writing accuracy. Findings from studies show that writing accuracy and anxiety are negatively correlated. In situations of anxiety and stress, the likelihood of minor mistakes increases. These errors often include incorrect use of the third-person singular, mistakes in singular and plural forms, and spelling errors. Elevated anxiety can make students more prone to these types of inaccuracies. To minimize needless errors, teachers should stress the value of having pupils write specifics throughout the educational process and concentrate on improving their language proficiency. Moreover, teachers should create a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment, minimizing students' learning pressure as much as possible. Writing fluency and syntactic complexity are unaffected by writing anxiety. This is because middle school students have limited linguistic knowledge and use simple syntactic structures and simple words in writing. Therefore, students do not exert extra effort to apply complex sentence structures and vocabulary when writing. Teachers should focus on specific aspects of their teaching, relatively easing the requirements for using complex sentence structures and vocabulary while emphasizing accuracy. This approach can effectively and efficiently improve students' writing scores and levels.

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