

A Review of Research on Foreign Language Writing Anxiety

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Abstract: As an important aspect of second language learning, foreign language writing anxiety has attracted widespread attention from experts and scholars at home and abroad, and the relevant research are abundant. This paper summarizes the current research situations of foreign language writing anxiety at home and abroad by reviewing the relevant papers in the past 15 years. It mainly concerns four aspects: research on the writing anxiety scale, the relationship between foreign language writing anxiety and writing outcomes, self-regulation strategies and teacher's intervention. Besides, the paper further discusses the existing problems and shortcomings in order to provide reference for future research on foreign language writing anxiety.

1. Introduction

As one of the four important skills in foreign language learning, writing not only helps learners master the systematic knowledge, but also clearly reflects the degree of learners' mastery. However, writing is also a difficult point for learners in their process of mastering a foreign language. Therefore, when faced with second language writing, learners often have a certain degree of anxiety, such as fear attitude and aversion, as well as anxiety behaviors such as cognitive obstruction and strong physiological response[1]. Since the 21st century, the study of foreign language writing anxiety has received more and more attention, and domestic researchers' exploration began in the 1970s. At present, remarkable progress has been made in the research on foreign language writing anxiety. In view of this, this paper summarizes the research on foreign language writing anxiety in the past 15 years, explores the current situations in this field, points out the existing problems and shortcomings, and provides reference for the research on foreign language writing anxiety.

2. Foreign Language Writing Anxiety

Anxiety is one of the important affective factors that influence foreign language learning and it also plays a significant role in psychological research. Horwitz et al. first proposed the concept of "foreign language learning anxiety" in 1986. He believed that foreign language anxiety is a unique and complex synthesis of self-awareness, beliefs, emotions and behaviors related to classroom foreign language learning on account of the uniqueness of foreign language learning[2]. On this basis, he

developed Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure the depth and breadth of foreign language learning anxiety. At present, there are more and more research on foreign language learning anxiety, especially English learning anxiety, which are gradually divided into listening anxiety, speaking anxiety, reading anxiety and writing anxiety.

Writing anxiety mainly refers to the psychological state or behavior that foreign language learners experience during their writing process, such as avoiding writing tasks and worrying about their compositions being read or reviewed by others[3]. Cheng further proposed the concept of foreign language writing anxiety, arguing that it is a relatively persistent anxiety which is generated in the process of foreign language writing. It is usually manifested by blocked thinking activities, increased physiological responses, and discomfort in behaviors. For foreign language learners, writing anxiety may hinder their writing process to a certain extent, resulting in writing difficulties, painful and negative emotional experience of writing tasks and activities, and thus lowering their expectations for successful writing[3]. As a result, learners tend to hold negative attitudes towards foreign language writing[4]. Nevertheless, foreign language writing anxiety is a kind of trait that arises from a specific foreign language writing learning situation[5], and the initial research subjects are mainly native speakers. Therefore, foreign language writing learners generally experience more anxiety than native learners. Hence the research on foreign language writing anxiety is helpful for lessening learners' writing anxiety, enhancing their positive emotional experience of foreign language writing, thus improving their writing ability.

3. A Review of Research on Foreign Language Writing Anxiety

This paper reviews the research status of foreign language writing anxiety at home and abroad from four aspects: research on the writing anxiety scale, the relationship between foreign language writing anxiety and writing outcomes, self-regulation strategies and teacher's intervention.

3.1. Research on the Writing Anxiety Scale

Daly and Miller compiled the Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) for native language learners[4], which is the first questionnaire to systematically examine writing anxiety. However, the validity of the scale has been questioned by some researchers because it was designed for writing in native language rather than foreign language.

Cheng et al.'s research showed that as a special writing process, foreign language writing anxiety needs a specialized measurement. Therefore, Cheng developed the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), which consists of 27 items. It mainly includes three dimensions: somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety and avoidance behaviour[6]. Guo Yan and Qin Xiaoqing translated and revised the SLWAI with a total of 20 items, and further divided it into four factors, namely classroom teaching anxiety, conceiving anxiety, avoidance behaviour and lack of confidence[7]. Then, internal consistency reliability analysis was conducted on the whole scale and the four factor subscales. Subsequently, it was widely adopted in the study of foreign language writing anxiety on account of its high reliability and validity. For example, Guo Yan and Xu Jinfen used it to investigate the learning anxiety in five dimensions: classroom, listening, reading, speaking and writing. Among them, writing anxiety was measured by Cheng's SLWAI. It was found that the anxiety of the participants in all dimensions is at a moderate level [8].

Bai Liru tried to compile the "English Writing Anxiety Inducing Factor Scale" which is suitable for the teaching background of Chinese universities. The scale has good predictive validity. However, since it was proposed in recent years, the application of subsequent research on writing anxiety is relatively scarce, so its reliability and validity remain to be verified[9].

3.2. Research on the Relationship between Foreign Language Writing Anxiety and Writing Outcomes

The research on foreign language writing anxiety usually focuses on its relationship with writing outcomes firstly, such as its correlation with writing achievement, writing level or writing ability. Scholars at home and abroad have different conclusions on the relationship between writing anxiety and writing outcomes.

In terms of China, Guo Yan and Qin Xiaoqing explored the foreign language writing anxiety of non-English majors in China through questionnaires and interviews, and found that overall writing anxiety and its four anxiety factors are significantly negatively correlated with writing performance [10]. Zhou Baoguo and Tang Junjun investigated the influence of second language writing anxiety on the writing process and found that second language writing anxiety is significantly negatively correlated with writing performance, which is related to the usage of their mother tongue in the writing process [11]. Li Hang and Liu Rude examined the foreign language writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy of non-English majors at the beginning of their first semester, and found that foreign language writing anxiety is significantly negatively correlated with writing self-efficacy and writing scores [12]. Li Hang selected Cheng's Second Language Writing Anxiety Scale (SLWAI) and conducted a semi-structured interview with 6 selected students to explore the quasi-causal relationship between college students' English writing anxiety and their writing scores. The results showed that writing anxiety and writing scores in both tests are significantly negatively correlated, indicating that writing anxiety is an important factor that affects writing performance [13]. Guo Jidong used structural equation modeling and other methods to investigate the relationship between college students' English writing self-concept, self-efficacy, writing anxiety and writing scores, and found that writing anxiety is significantly negatively correlated with writing scores, and writing self-concept and writing self-efficacy have indirect positive effects on writing scores through the mediating effect of writing anxiety [14].

In terms of foreign scholars, Woodrow proved that writing anxiety is not directly related to writing level, but is related to self-efficacy, and self-efficacy plays a mediating role between writing anxiety and writing level [15]. Alfarwan used questionnaires and interviews to determine whether writing anxiety experienced by third-level Saudi writers always has a negative impact on writing. The results showed that regardless of writing level or writing condition, writing anxiety is the least intense variable of all relevant variables. And some anxiety experienced by many participants in the certain ways and certain time has a positive impact on students' English writing [16]. Therefore, the influence of anxiety on writing is not always negative, and it can have positive effects in some specific situations, which needs to be further confirmed.

From the above literature review, it can be seen that in recent years foreign language writing anxiety has received extensive attention from more and more experts and scholars, and the relevant domestic research on foreign language writing anxiety has surged significantly, yielding fruitful results. Various other factors such as self-efficacy are integrated into second language writing research.

3.3. Research on Foreign Language Writing Anxiety and Self-regulation Strategies

Learners' self-regulation refers to the process in which learners systematically guide their own thinking, emotions and behaviors towards the realization of goals [17]. Xu Jinfen and Kou Jinnan pointed out that English writing anxiety is common among college students, and they mainly adopt four adjustment strategies in English learning, including self-efficacy enhancement, problem avoidance, problem solving and attention diversion [18]. Ma Jie and Dong Pan testified that college students' English writing anxiety is generally at a medium level, and their self-regulation strategies mainly encompass action strategy, conceiving strategy, avoidance strategy and emotion strategy. In

addition, the level of anxiety can also affect the use of strategies[19]. Li Hui et al. explored the correlation between writing anxiety and writing scores of English majors and their coping strategies, and found that the self-regulation consists of subjective factors and objective factors. Subjective factors include making up for the deficiency and increasing the complement of knowledge. Objective factors covers predictable and unpredictable factors[20].

Jawas's research revealed that some students reduce their writing anxiety by exchanging ideas and constructing essays through pair or group cooperation [21]. Qashoa's experiments indicated that students mainly employ emotional, cognitive and test-related strategies when dealing with writing anxiety. Specifically, emotional strategies such as maintaining confidence in writing, holding a positive attitude towards making or correcting mistakes, and treating it as an essential process in learning, are all conducive to reducing anxiety. Cognitive strategies include imitating `examples, increasing practice, as well as recognizing and seeking solutions to the grammar and spelling problems. The strategies related to testing contain two stages: pre-test and in-test. What's more, different self-regulation strategies are inseparable from teachers' encouragement and participation [22]. In other words, teachers' involvement plays an important role in relieving students' writing anxiety.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that learners' self-regulation strategies are helpful for their writing. Besides, teacher's intervention is also known for its effect of lowering learner's anxiety.

3.4. Research on Foreign Language Writing Anxiety and Teacher's Intervention

Teacher's intervention refers to the intentional intervention or implementation of certain predetermined teaching means in classroom teaching in an effort to eliminate or reduce the anxiety of learners in their writing process[23]. This paper discusses the relationship between foreign language writing anxiety and teacher's intervention from the following three aspects: teaching form, ways of writing and feedback form.

Teaching form. Wu Yuhong and Gu Weixing found that cooperative learning can effectively reduce learners' overall writing anxiety, somatic anxiety and evaluation anxiety, but has little impact on avoidance behavior and self-confidence anxiety[24]. Besides, compared with the traditional teaching form, some scholars found that new teaching form is more conducive to reducing students' writing anxiety. For example, Guo Shixiang investigated the impact of writing teaching mode of AAWP on English majors' writing anxiety in higher vocational colleges, and found that this teaching mode could effectively relieve learners' writing anxiety[25]. Through follow-up investigation, Zhong Hanchun and Fan Wuqiu found that CLIL mode can effectively reduce students' writing anxiety[26]. Liu Yuanyuan proved that students' writing anxiety has been reduced and their writing ability has also been improved after constructing sentences under the guidance of teachers[27]. However, some scholars proved that teachers' teaching methods may increase students' writing anxiety. For instance, Mohammed discussed whether multimedia-based conceptual drawing and online reading before writing could affect students' writing quality and writing anxiety. It was showed that this teaching method could improve students' writing level, but it increased students' writing anxiety[28].

Way of writing. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, Guo Yan found that Length Approach can alleviate the negative impact of writing anxiety on the writing process and performance, improve students' writing ability and enhance their emotional ability so as to realize "promoting learning by writing"[29]. Zhang Lin and Qin Ting confirmed that continuation task is helpful for reducing learners' writing anxiety, especially their avoidance behavior and conceiving anxiety[30]. Similarly, Zhan Jianling et al. found that comparative continuation task can also promote learners' writing ability and it is an effective method to relieve the writing anxiety of second language learners,

especially in conceiving anxiety [31].

Form of feedback. Gu Kai and Wang Tongshun's research showed that peer feedback can significantly reduce learners' writing anxiety. Furthermore, Jahin's research also indicated that peer feedback has a positive impact on writing anxiety and writing ability [32].

4. Shortcomings and Prospects of Research on Foreign Language Writing Anxiety

From the above review, it can be seen that in recent years, foreign language writing anxiety has received extensive attention from more and more experts and scholars, and the domestic research on foreign language writing anxiety has slightly expanded, and the research findings are constantly enriched. However, due to the relatively late start of research in this area, there are still some deficiencies.

There are some deficiencies in the research on foreign language writing anxiety, which are reflected in the following four aspects: Firstly, the degree of localization of the scale is low. The scales used in writing anxiety research are mainly SLWAI and WAT, both of which did not take Chinese mainland's learners and background into consideration. And the reliability and validity of Bai Liru's scale remain to be tested. Secondly, the scope of the research subjects is small. At present, the research subjects of foreign language writing anxiety at home and abroad are mainly undergraduates and middle school students. Thirdly, the research method is single. Most scholars at home and abroad adopt quantitative analysis methods, particularly questionnaires and a few employ interview. In consequence, there is a lack of diversity in research methods. Finally, the research content is short of innovation. Although there is a large amount of literature on foreign language writing anxiety, there is a small amount of literature published in core journals, and there is a large degree of repetition of research content.

Future research on foreign language writing anxiety can be considered from the following several aspects: First, developing a localized scale. A scale that is based on the consideration of factors such as the education background and purpose in Chinese mainland is necessary. Second, expanding the scope of research subjects. In the future, the scope of research subjects should be appropriately expanded, such as the primary school students, ethnic minorities, exchange students and overseas students. Third, employing a variety of research methods. The researchers can also adopt different methods such as classroom observation, thinking aloud and reflection journal in order to supplement the quantitative data. Fourth, broadening the breadth of research perspective. Future research can focus on individual differences in age, gender, cognitive level, etc., and examine the intervention of mother tongue in foreign language writing anxiety, as well as the influence of teachers' individual factors on learners' writing anxiety. Existing research mainly concentrates on the negative effects of writing anxiety, hence the positive effects of writing anxiety can also be examined. In addition, thinking also plays an important role in the writing process, so the correlation between writing anxiety and critical thinking can also be considered.

5. Conclusion

By retrieving the literature on foreign language writing anxiety at home and abroad in the past 15 years, this paper mainly reviews the research on the writing anxiety scale, the relationship between foreign language writing anxiety and writing outcomes, the research on self-regulation strategies and teacher's intervention. It is concluded that there are abundant research findings on foreign language writing anxiety at home and abroad, but there are still shortcomings in the following four aspects: the research instruments, the research subjects, the research method and the research content. In light of this, it is necessary to develop a localized scale, expand the scope of research subjects, diversify the research methods, and broaden the breadth of research perspectives. To sum up, the research on

foreign language writing anxiety needs to be further explored.

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