

Exploring Strategies to Alleviate Writing Anxiety among High School Students in the Context of the New College Entrance Examination

Yue Huang

China West Normal University, Nanchong, Sichuan, 637001, China

Abstract

Currently, in the context of the new curriculum and the new college entrance examination, English writing has occupied a considerable proportion in various exams, and its importance is self-evident. However, precisely because of its importance and difficulty, students are prone to experience writing anxiety during the writing process, which affects the completion of writing tasks and hinders the development of writing skills. In this regard, this article primarily targets high school students, and based on existing materials and research, explores the causes of their writing anxiety, in order to propose four teaching measures aimed at alleviating high school students' writing anxiety: increase the inspiration and Cultivation of writing thinking; select and expand appropriate teaching materials; training writing strategies to improve writing effectiveness; confident writing, maintain a positive attitude. Through this article, both teachers and students can pay more attention to writing anxiety, take it seriously, and better improve our writing teaching.

Keywords

Writing Anxiety; Foreign Language Teaching; Writing Strategy.

1. Introduction

1.1. Formulating the Question

English writing, as one of the productive skills, is undoubtedly of great significance and importance in the process of English learning. In the current context of new curriculum standards, new textbooks, and the new college entrance examination, the writing score has greatly increased, the writing test types have become more complex and diverse, and the writing tasks have become increasingly challenging. As a result, high school students are suddenly facing a significant increase in writing pressure and writing anxiety. Compared to listening, speaking, and reading, writing is often the most difficult skill for foreign language learners to master. This is because writing itself is delayed and implicit, and can be influenced by various factors during the writing process. For high school students, English writing not only requires a large vocabulary foundation, but also the proficient use of relevant vocabulary and grammar knowledge. In addition, learners need to be mentally active, have clear logic, and express themselves through good grammar and discourse structure. Therefore, English writing ability is an important manifestation of learners' foreign language ability and one of the main challenges they face.

Due to the difficulty and importance of English writing, learners are prone to develop feelings of fear and anxiety during writing practice and exams, which can affect their English learning level and expression. In addition to external factors and learning environment, students' attitudes, motivations, and individual differences can also contribute to varying degrees of anxiety in English writing. Therefore, how to deal with writing anxiety has become an unavoidable issue in the process of English learning.

1.2. Purpose and Significance of the Study

Given the current era and environment, a large number of learners face pressure and anxiety in English writing, which hinders the development of their writing skills and English ability. Based on this, this article aims to study high school students as the research subjects, starting from the discussion of anxiety itself, and combining existing research and materials to explore the reasons for their writing anxiety. The article proposes corresponding strategies in order to help students alleviate writing anxiety to some extent.

2. Problem Identification

2.1. Foreign Language Writing Anxiety

Anxiety belongs to the category of emotional factors and is a common and complex emotional state. Horwitz(1986) was the first to propose the concept of foreign language anxiety, which he believed to be the self-consciousness, beliefs, and emotions that learners experience during the process of learning a foreign language. Factors such as students' personality traits, exam results, self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as teachers' teaching styles, can all contribute to learners experiencing anxiety. Leary(1982) believes that anxiety is a cognitive emotional response characterized by physiological arousal and concerns about potential negative outcomes that individuals perceive as imminent.

Over the years, numerous studies have shown that anxiety inevitably affects students' learning outcomes. Scholars and educators both domestically and internationally have conducted extensive research to identify the relationship between anxiety and foreign language writing. Daly & Miller(1975) first introduced the concept of writing anxiety and developed the "Writing Anxiety Scale" specifically for native language learners in the field of writing. Chastain(1975) observed a positive correlation between course grades and test anxiety in German and Spanish language courses.

Compared to foreign countries, research on writing anxiety in China started much later. Ma Jie and Dong Pan(2018) classified, counted, and analyzed articles related to foreign language writing anxiety to clarify the development of domestic and international research on foreign language writing anxiety. Research on foreign language writing anxiety mainly includes the state of writing anxiety, the causes of writing anxiety, and strategies to cope with it. Zhou Baoguo and Tang Junjun(2010) found that foreign language writing anxiety has a negative impact on the writing proficiency of language learners. Wu Yuhong and Gu Weixing's(2011) research found that cooperative learning can reduce learners' evaluation anxiety. Bai Liru's(2017) research found that factors leading to English writing anxiety include individual factors and process factors. Zhang Lin and others(2020) have demonstrated through experiments that continuation writing can help reduce learners' writing anxiety and promote improvement in writing ability. Zhan Jianling and others(2022) also found through experiments that writing anxiety is significantly negatively correlated with writing performance.

2.2. The Causes of Learners' Writing Anxiety

Foreign language writing anxiety does exist, and we should try our best to alleviate its disadvantages. But before that, we need to figure out the reasons for the emergence of writing anxiety. From a subjective perspective, for learners themselves, the main cause of their English writing anxiety is their insufficient writing ability or fear of negative evaluations. At the same time, students' own personalities can also contribute to foreign language writing anxiety, as a lack of confidence and introversion can lead to a negative or even aversive attitude towards writing. In addition, learners' poor use of writing strategies during the writing process can also result in English writing anxiety.

From an objective perspective, the main causes of student writing anxiety are the students' learning environment and factors related to teachers. For high school students, in addition to their academic and college pressures, they also have to face high expectations from their teachers and family, which can increase their anxiety. Additionally, the teaching methods and strategies used by teachers can also affect students' enthusiasm for writing and consequently lead to anxiety. At the same time, the design of writing materials and writing courses can also contribute to writing anxiety among learners to some extent.

3. Measures Taken to Reduce Writing Anxiety

3.1. Increase the Inspiration and Cultivation of Writing Thinking

One of the primary factors contributing to students' writing anxiety is the perceived challenge of initiating and sustaining the writing process. This difficulty often arises from a lack of emphasis on the initial brainstorming phase in teaching practices. When teachers do not adequately support students in generating ideas and structuring their thoughts, learners may feel uncertain and overwhelmed about how to approach their writing tasks effectively. To address this issue, educators can benefit from reevaluating their instructional approaches towards writing, placing a stronger emphasis on explicit writing guidance and support.

By reorienting their teaching philosophy and prioritizing comprehensive writing instruction, teachers can play a crucial role in fostering students' confidence and competence in written expression. This shift involves nurturing and empowering students' writing thinking abilities, thereby equipping them with the necessary tools to navigate through writing challenges successfully. Moreover, educators should actively engage with students to provide timely and constructive feedback, guiding them in overcoming writing-related anxieties.

To promote a conducive writing environment, it is essential to introduce engaging topics before the writing process commences. By sparking students' curiosity and encouraging in-depth discussions on the subject matter, educators can enhance students' interest and investment in the writing task. Additionally, cultivating critical and creative thinking skills among students is pivotal in enabling them to generate innovative and meaningful content. By equipping students with the requisite analytical and imaginative capacities, educators can ensure that learners have a solid foundation upon which to build their written work, ultimately mitigating anxiety and enhancing the writing experience.

3.2. Select and Expand Appropriate Teaching Materials

Writing apprehension is frequently linked to learners' language input, particularly among high school students. These learners often encounter difficulty in navigating words, phrases, and grammatical nuances while engaging in writing tasks. Their vocabulary and sentence structure are often constrained by the examples provided in their textbooks, which may not offer sufficient exposure to rich and varied language input. To address this issue effectively, it becomes imperative to curate and present writing materials that not only align with students' interests but also offer authentic, contemporary, and vibrant content to enhance their language acquisition and usage skills.

By carefully selecting and expanding on relevant writing resources, educators can broaden students' exposure to diverse linguistic patterns and terminology. By incorporating more authentic and up-to-date articles into the curriculum, instructors can maximize students' language immersion and engagement, thus promoting a deeper understanding and appreciation of language usage. This strategic approach to material selection serves as a catalyst for enhancing students' language input, ultimately facilitating their writing proficiency and alleviating anxiety associated with the writing process.

Through the strategic deployment of appropriate teaching materials, instructors can cultivate students' enthusiasm for writing by providing them with engaging and meaningful content. By exposing learners to a variety of topics and perspectives, educators can offer students the opportunity to explore different linguistic styles and prompts, thereby fostering creativity and critical thinking in their written work. By actively supporting students in honing their writing skills and facilitating effective communication, instructors can play a pivotal role in mitigating writing anxiety and promoting a more positive and productive writing experience for students.

3.3. Training Writing Strategies to Improve Writing Effectiveness

In the realm of writing instruction, educators are tasked with customizing their pedagogical approaches to cater to the unique needs and proficiency levels of their students. It is imperative for teachers to craft a repertoire of writing training strategies and plans that align with the current skill set of their students. Prior to engaging in the writing process, students must establish a robust knowledge base, enhance their lexical repertoire, and refine their sentence construction abilities. These foundational elements serve as the bedrock upon which students can build their writing proficiency and fluency. Throughout the writing endeavor, students should be mentored in the art of effectively utilizing and organizing their materials. Encouraging the practice of outlining and fostering a culture of drafting are essential components in nurturing students' writing skills. By instilling these practices, learners cultivate a structured approach to composing their thoughts and ideas, thereby enhancing the coherence and clarity of their written work.

Once the writing task is completed, students should embrace the practice of revising and reviewing their compositions. Additionally, engaging in peer-editing sessions where students provide constructive feedback and suggestions to one another fosters a collaborative learning environment. This peer interaction not only enhances students' critical thinking skills but also promotes a sense of community and shared responsibility for improving writing proficiency. Teachers play a pivotal role in this process by promptly evaluating students' writing endeavors and offering constructive feedback to address any identified issues. By providing timely guidance and support, educators empower learners to rectify their mistakes and refine their writing skills effectively. This feedback loop is instrumental in fostering continuous improvement and growth in students' writing capabilities, ultimately enhancing their overall writing competence and confidence.

3.4. Confident Writing, Maintain a Positive Attitude

Alongside the enhancement of writing competencies, fostering a self-assured and positive mindset can serve as a significant mechanism in mitigating anxiety. This is particularly salient for high school students, who navigate a pivotal developmental juncture in their academic and personal growth. It is imperative for these students to cultivate a belief in their capabilities and refrain from imposing excessive self-imposed pressures. Central to this ideology is the conviction that diligent effort and consistent practice are instrumental in enhancing writing aptitude.

Acknowledging and accepting one's limitations is an integral aspect of personal development; however, it is crucial not to amplify these shortcomings disproportionately. Instead, the emphasis should be placed on harnessing individual strengths and maintaining an optimistic outlook towards the writing process. Embracing a growth-oriented perspective entails leveraging setbacks as valuable learning opportunities, extracting insights and knowledge from failures to augment one's skill set. In essence, adopting a resilient and positive mindset enables individuals to navigate challenges with fortitude and tenacity. By reframing setbacks as stepping stones towards improvement and success, students can harness failures as catalysts for growth. This iterative process of learning from missteps not only bolsters one's competence but also fosters a culture of continuous self-improvement and advancement. By nurturing a

confident and optimistic ethos, students can cultivate a robust foundation for overcoming obstacles, refining their writing proficiencies, and fostering a proactive and resilient approach towards personal and academic growth.

4. Conclusion

Written composition has always been a difficult language skill for high school students to master, which often leads to a high level of writing anxiety during the writing process. In light of this, both teachers and students should pay attention to students' writing anxiety and provide timely guidance and encouragement when it is detected. In addition, teachers should also guide students to use self-regulation strategies for anxiety, helping them to reduce high anxiety to low anxiety and transform low anxiety into motivation for writing learning. Ultimately, this will eliminate writing anxiety and enhance writing ability.

References

- [1] Horwitz E K, Horwitz M B, Cope J A. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, Vol.(1986)No.2, p.125-132.
- [2] Leary M: *Understanding Social Anxiety: Social, Personality and Clinical Perspective*. (Beverly Hills: Sage 1982).
- [3] Daly J A, Miller M D. The Empirical Development of An Instrument of Writing Apprehension. *Research in the Teaching of English*, Vol.(1975)No.9, p.242-249.
- [4] Chastain K. Affective and Ability Factors in Second Language Learning. *Language Learning*, Vol. (1975) No.25, p.153-161.
- [5] B.G.Li, J.J.Tang. Empirical Study on the Impact of Second Language Writing Anxiety on the Writing Process. *Foreign Language Education*, Vol.31(2010)No.1, p.64-68.
- [6] Y.H.Wu, W.X.Gu. Empirical Study on the Reduction of English Writing Anxiety among Non-English Major College Students through Collaborative Learning. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, Vol. (2011)No.6, p.51-55.
- [7] L.R.Bai. Development of a Scale for Identifying Factors Triggering Anxiety in English Writing. *Foreign Language World*, Vol.(2017)No.5, p.74-82.
- [8] J.Ma, P.Dong. Research on Writing Anxiety in Domestic and Foreign Languages in the Context of Big Data. *Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education*, Vol.(2018)No.2, p.32-37.
- [9] J.L.Zhan, L.Jiang, L.L.Huang. Research on Second Language Writing Anxiety in Contrastive Continuation. *Foreign Languages Bimonthly*, Vol.45(2022)No.2, p.61-69+160.
- [10] L.Zhang, T.Qin. The Impact of Continuation Writing on Writing Anxiety and Writing Ability of English Majors. *Foreign Language Teaching*, Vol.41(2020)No.6, p.72-76.