

Measures to Reduce Writing Anxiety in High School Students

Junnan Pan

China West Normal University, No.1 Shida Road, Shunqing District, Nanchong, Sichuan, China

Abstract

Writing is a fundamental skill in modern English language education in China, serving as a means of language output and a crucial criterion for evaluating English proficiency. As teaching reforms progress and the college entrance examination system evolves, the significance of English writing has grown, accompanied by heightened expectations for high school students' writing abilities. However, the reality of high school classrooms often reveals students' apprehension and anxiety towards writing, impeding their progress in this area. Consequently, this study aims to delve into the origins of writing anxiety in high school English classrooms and propose constructive teaching suggestions to alleviate students' anxiety, ultimately enhancing the quality and proficiency of their English writing.

Keywords

English Writing; Writing Anxiety; High School.

1. Introduction

1.1. Formulating the Question

Writing anxiety significantly influences the English writing proficiency of high school students, manifesting in various ways. Firstly, it diminishes motivation and engagement, leading students to avoid or delay writing tasks due to fear of failure or negative evaluation. Secondly, it hampers idea flow and coherent expression, resulting in disjointed and hesitant writing. Thirdly, it fosters negative self-perception, eroding confidence and hindering linguistic experimentation. Moreover, anxiety drives students to prioritize error avoidance over content and stifles creativity. Lastly, high-stakes situations intensify stress and worsen anxiety, undermining writing performance. To mitigate writing anxiety, educators should provide comprehensive support, cultivate a positive writing environment, and implement confidence-building strategies.

1.2. Purpose and Significance of the Study

This study endeavors to shed light on the complex issue of writing anxiety in high school English classrooms. By identifying its causes and proposing effective teaching strategies, we hope to alleviate writing anxiety among high school students and enhance their English writing skills and proficiency. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the improvement of English writing instruction and create a more positive and empowering learning environment for high school students.

2. Problem Identification

2.1. Foreign Language Anxiety

In 1986, American psychologist Horwitz introduced the concept of "foreign language anxiety," which refers to the comprehensive emotional manifestation of learners' self-awareness, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors related to the process of learning a foreign language. To better measure the level of foreign language anxiety among learners, Horwitz and colleagues

developed the "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale." However, subsequent empirical studies found that this scale was only applicable to assessing anxiety in English oral communication and was not effective in measuring anxiety in other language skills such as listening, writing, and reading. In 2004, Cheng developed the "Second Language Writing Anxiety Scale" based on further research to specifically measure anxiety in foreign language writing.

2.1.1. Writing Anxiety

Currently, research on writing anxiety at home and abroad mainly focuses on measuring the level of writing anxiety, examining its relationship with writing performance, and identifying factors that influence writing anxiety. However, the research findings are not consistent. Studies by Gu and Wang (2004) and Guo and Qin (2010) found that writing anxiety is prevalent among students, and Guo and Qin also discovered a significant negative correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance. On the other hand, Woodrow (2011) found no direct relationship between writing anxiety and writing performance but identified a connection with self-efficacy. Kara's empirical research (2013) indicated a link between learners' writing anxiety and teachers and instructional materials. Furthermore, Guo's study in 2018 explored the relationship between variables related to writing anxiety and writing performance among college students, revealing a positive correlation between writing self-efficacy and writing performance, and a significant negative correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance.

2.2. The Causes of High School Students' Writing Anxiety

Writing anxiety in foreign language learners can stem from various causes, with some common factors influencing its manifestation.

Firstly, the fear of making mistakes plays a significant role in triggering writing anxiety. Learners may be apprehensive about committing grammatical errors, using vocabulary incorrectly, or having their writing misunderstood by others. The fear of being judged or criticized for these mistakes can intensify their anxiety.

Secondly, a lack of confidence in writing skills can contribute to anxiety. Some learners feel uncertain about their ability to express themselves effectively in the foreign language, leading to self-doubt and anxiety about their writing performance.

Thirdly, learners often find themselves under immense self-imposed pressure to attain impeccable standards in their writing, particularly when they have set unrealistic expectations or engage in constant comparisons with their peers. The apprehension of falling short of these self-imposed benchmarks can significantly contribute to heightened levels of anxiety.

Furthermore, cultural differences can exacerbate writing anxiety. Writing in a foreign language involves understanding and incorporating different cultural norms and conventions. Learners may feel anxious about not fully comprehending or appropriately incorporating these cultural aspects into their writing.

Time constraints also play a role in writing anxiety. Writing assignments often come with deadlines, creating time pressure for learners. The fear of not being able to complete the task within the given timeframe can heighten anxiety levels.

Additionally, a lack of sufficient writing practice can contribute to anxiety. Limited practice and exposure to writing in the foreign language, as well as inadequate feedback, can make learners anxious about their ability to perform well in writing tasks.

It is important to acknowledge that these causes are not exhaustive, as individual learners may have unique factors contributing to their writing anxiety. Moreover, the combination, intensity, and impact of these factors can vary from person to person. Understanding these causes can help educators and learners address and alleviate writing anxiety effectively.

3. Measures Taken to Reduce Writing Anxiety in High School Students

To alleviate writing anxiety, it is necessary for teachers to take appropriate measures during the pre-writing stage and the assessment stage. These measures include creating a positive and supportive atmosphere, addressing students' writing obstacles, assisting students in utilizing writing scaffolds, teaching writing strategies, and providing diverse feedback and so on.

In the pre-writing stage, the teacher should begin by introducing the topic and basic requirements of the writing task. Subsequently, the teacher should guide students in reviewing previously learned language knowledge. After acquiring some useful expressions, students find it easier to apply them in English writing, thereby alleviating writing anxiety. Following this, the teacher can create a writing scenario using multimedia technology and organize activities such as brainstorming, discussions, and interviews to stimulate students' desire for communication and language output, as well as to gather more writing information and ideas. Finally, the teacher can provide students with writing techniques, such as using mind maps and other tools to organize their thoughts and complete an outline.

During the writing assessment stage, the teacher should prioritize the writing process and highlight the role of performative evaluation. This process encompasses stages such as planning, gathering materials, organizing thoughts, drafting, and revising. Dong Beifei emphasizes the importance of observing students' writing behaviors at each stage and encouraging completion of the entire process. High school English writing assessment should supervise and guide students in areas such as preconceived notions based on life experiences, perception of writing materials, writing habits and attitudes, application of English writing micro-skills, text creation and revision, and collaborative writing environments. Moreover, assessment should reflect the thinking process of secondary school students' writing, recognizing that writing is fundamentally a thinking activity. Special attention should be given to students' affective and rational thinking in English writing, focusing on the richness and appropriateness of materials, generation and extraction of personalized viewpoints, and fluency and accuracy of English expression. Motivation should also be emphasized in assessment, taking into account students' emotions, thoughts, and concerns to foster substantial development at their current level and promote individual success. Finally, it is crucial to consider diverse assessment methods for the evaluation of secondary school English writing. Formative assessment should be the primary focus, supplemented by summative assessment. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods should be employed, with evaluators from various backgrounds and assessment formats. The evaluation content should be comprehensive, and the goals should be multidimensional. Utilizing diverse assessment methods enables students to gain insights into their writing strengths and weaknesses from multiple perspectives. Group and peer assessments can also help alleviate students' anxieties and fears of authority's criticism and rejection of their writing.

In conclusion, creating a supportive and non-judgmental environment, providing clear expectations and guidelines, and offering scaffolding and support are essential in building students' confidence and alleviating their anxiety. Teaching effective writing strategies, offering individualized support, and encouraging self-reflection and self-assessment help students develop their writing skills and take ownership of their learning. Providing regular feedback, fostering a growth mindset, and promoting authentic writing experiences further enhance students' motivation and engagement in English writing. With these strategies in place, educators can empower Chinese high school students to overcome English writing anxiety and excel in their English writing abilities.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, this study endeavors to shed light on the complex issue of writing anxiety in high school English classrooms. By identifying its causes, analyzing the flaws in current instructional practices, and proposing effective teaching strategies, this study hope to alleviate writing anxiety among high school students and enhance their English writing skills and proficiency. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the improvement of English writing instruction and create a more positive and empowering learning environment for high school students.

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