

The Influence of Writing Apprehension on Writing Process and Writing Performance of Non-English Majors

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Writing has always been regarded as a basic skill that is difficult to master, especially for second language or foreign language learners. The study carried out an empirical quantitative investigation and qualitative analysis of the causes of English writing apprehension among non-English majors in Qingdao University of Science and Technology. It is necessary to understand the similarities and differences of foreign language writing apprehension of students at the beginning of enrollment and its impact on the writing process and writing performance. The result shows that such anxiety and impact will change after a year or two years of systematic writing training, and further study whether their future writing performance can be predicted according to their writing apprehension level. Aimed at the analysis outcome of the study, the author put forward three solutions from the perspective of reducing their writing apprehension and to boosting self-confidence in English writings for the purpose of improving the writing performance of the students.

Keywords: empirical study, writing apprehension, writing process, writing performance

Literature Review

The term “writing apprehension” was coined by Daly and Miller (1975a) to refer to an individual difference associated with an increase in anxiety when one is faced with situations requiring writing. A certain amount of creative tension is present and necessary in all writers, but for some the situation brings on a destructive amount of tension. From the perspective of Daly and Miller, “it specifically refers to a situation and subject specific individual difference associated with a person’s tendencies to approach or avoid situations perceived to potentially require writing accompanied by some amount of perceived evaluation” (1975a). Daly and Miller once even conducted the study of writing apprehension after developing a 26-item questionnaire, the Writing Apprehension Scale, that placed individuals along a continuum from low to high apprehension. Daly and Miller (1975a; 1975b) established the validity and reliability of their scale, and now the Writing Apprehension Scale has been used with individuals from elementary school to adults, and most of the rest of this paper will report what has been learned about writing apprehension using this scale.

However, according to McLeod (1987), writing apprehension is an emotional factor, which generally refers to the tension, anxiety, or even high anxiety felt by students in the writing process. This emotion often disturbs the writing process. Mabrito (2000), who shares similar ideas with Daly, also defines writing apprehension as “a series of behaviors, including the tendency of writers to avoid situations involving writing, finding that writing is unrequited, being afraid to evaluate their own writing, and having greater anxiety about seeing their own writing on public forums” (p. 41). To be more exact, writing apprehension is an anxiety about writing (Lee & Krashen, 2002), which can affect many aspects of students’ life, such as social participation, academic and career choices. Karakaya and Ülper (2011) reported that the main cause of students’ anxiety is the fear of negative evaluation from the classroom, teachers, exams, and personal characteristics, which leads to poor communication performance.

In English writing teaching, there has been a writing teaching movement in the past three decades. The focus of writing teaching has shifted from writing products to focusing on the author and the writing process (Silva, 1990; Reid, 1993a). The writing process is defined as “a series of operations leading to problem solving” (Graves, 1984, p. 4). The emphasis is on the process of writing, not the result of writing. This requires that students must go through a writing process including periodic writing stages in order to get the final results. These writing stages include the pre-writing, drafting, revision, and rewriting in the editing stages (Kim, 2010). ESL (English as a second language) teaching method of English writing has developed from product oriented (i.e. controlled writing method and current traditional rhetoric method) to process oriented. The process approach has always emphasized the importance of recursive procedures for pre-writing, drafting, evaluation, and revision. In the relevant ESL research, the research on the writing process of native English speakers is adopted. This suggests composition instruction that recognizes the importance of generating, formulating, and refining one’s ideas (Zamel, 1976). Zamel found that in the process, the author’s writing apprehension is also a process of discovery and self-expression (Zamel, 1976). When Zamel (1983) put forward the expressionist viewpoint that writing is a process of discovering and creating meaning, he also repeated such a cycle, and added from the cognitive school that the writing process is recursive, nonlinear, and complex. Flower and Hayes (1981) also showed that the writing process of college students is recursive rather than linear. The process teaching method helps students realize that writing is a process, and different writing has different processes.

Writing is a process of language output, which requires long-term and unremitting training. Therefore, writing has always been regarded as a basic skill that is difficult to master, especially for second language or foreign language learners. However, if you want to achieve good results in practical courses, especially in the higher education stage, writing is a skill that must be mastered. The research shows that students’ writing achievement is related to writing apprehension. Khaldieh (2000) once asked students to use introspection to write articles and record writing procedures and writing skills. It seems that students with high foreign language proficiency can control their anxiety level to a certain extent, have confidence in their language ability, and can fully develop their potential. On the contrary, students with poor foreign language proficiency show obvious anxiety and frustration, have a negative attitude towards writing, and have poor control over foreign language

institutions. Therefore, it is necessary and feasible to study the role and influence of writing anxiety in writing process and performance. Theoretically, and on the basis of previous research, those with low apprehension about writing should perform better on tests of writing skills than highly apprehensive writers. That is the presumption of our empirical study.

Research Status

A large amount of documents and research results show that Chinese college students have a low level of foreign language writing, who have obvious fear of difficulties in foreign language writing. They generally lack writing motivation and self-confidence, and have obvious writing psychological barriers and apprehension (Yang, 2004; Zhang, 2005; Huang, 2006). For freshmen, they receive relatively simple and basic foreign language writing exercises in high school. After entering the university, they begin to receive systematic foreign language writing teaching based on English teaching, which is a very challenging experience for them. Freshmen usually have problems in writing, such as lack of writing knowledge, limited vocabulary, more spelling mistakes, confusion of sentence structure, and lack of coherence and logic. According to the current summary and classification, the previous studies are mainly aimed at senior students and graduate students, especially English majors. Only a few studies have specifically discussed the relationship between writing apprehension and writing self-efficacy of non-English majors in Grade One and Two (Li, 2013), and the causal relationship between writing apprehension and writing performance (Li, 2015). However, few studies have been conducted on the impact of writing apprehension on writing process and performance.

Study Design

Based on the background, it is necessary to understand the similarities and differences of foreign language writing apprehension of students at the beginning of enrollment and its impact on the writing process and writing performance, and whether such anxiety and impact will change after a year or two years of systematic writing training, and further study whether their future writing performance can be predicted according to their writing apprehension level, so as to better provide reference indicators for our writing teaching, and thus more effectively improve the teaching effect of writing.

Data Collection and Analysis

The study was to investigate the relationship between the level of writing apprehension, writing proficiency, writing self-efficacy, and English writing achievement. A total of 60 non-English major college students from Qingdao University of Science and Technology participated in the study. All the respondents were administered with three instruments measuring their writing apprehension levels, writing proficiency, and writing self-efficacy. Data were collected through the Writing Apprehension Test and final course grades of writing classes and subjected to descriptive statistics, factor analysis, reliability coefficients, correlations, ANOVA, and t-test to address research questions (Kim, 2010).

At the beginning of the semester, the mean of the writing scores was 15.84 while at the end of the semester, the mean of the writing scores was 16.43. At the beginning of the semester, the standard deviation of the

writing scores was 1.235 while at the end of the semester, the standard deviation of the writing scores was 1.379. It was found that the writing anxiety at all levels of the participants was all significantly negatively correlated to their writing self-efficacy as well as writing performance. Females have a higher level of writing apprehension than their male counterparts, but they also have a higher score on the average than the other male classmates. In general, their writing self-efficacy was significantly positively related to their writing performance. On the whole, writing anxiety at the beginning of the semester cannot significantly and negatively predicted their writing performance at the end of the semester.

Solutions

The findings of the study actually had educational implications for teaching English to second language learners from the perspective of reducing their writing apprehension and to boosting self-confidence in English writings, which can further boost their writing self-efficacy. Based on the findings, the study presents some recommendations to overcome this problem.

1. As a foreign language, non-English majors have a strong fear of communication because of the lack of strong motivation and practice opportunities to write in English. Therefore, College English teachers should cultivate students' internal interest in foreign languages and cultures, create writing opportunities with real communicative significance, enhance their self-confidence and self-efficacy, help them establish internal incentive mechanisms, and therefore stimulate students' strong desire to communicate in English. It is necessary to truly stimulate students' internal motivation to communicate in English, and overcome their fear of communication. The teachers should help alleviate the writing apprehension level through providing them with a large amount of writing practice, especially on the writing assessment platforms like *iwrite* developed by U campus.

2. Specifically, College English teachers can design targeted and oriented writing tasks in combination with teaching materials, relevant reading materials, and video materials, help students accumulate writing materials, reduce language barriers, guide students to adopt positive behavior strategies, and help them develop the habit of consciously collecting writing materials in the daily English learning process. English writing learning can be transformed into autonomous internalization behavior. Through the use of mind mapping, brainstorming, critical reading, and other activities to carry out pre-writing thinking training, the teacher can guide students to adopt flexible thinking strategies. Always adopt personalized encouragement and guidance methods, especially for students with high English writing anxiety, to guide students to reduce excessive attention to language errors and writing (Wang & Zeng, 2021).

3. Pay attention to discovering and appreciating the accurate words, wonderful sentence patterns, and ingenious ideas in the students' writing. Stimulate the students' positive emotions, enhance their writing confidence and sense of achievement, and relieve their writing anxiety, so as to encourage the students to use less or no negative avoidance strategies, and finally form a good habit and internalization behavior of actively completing English writing tasks. This teaching method takes the writing process as the focus of writing teaching. Through the process of model text explanation, imitation writing, independent writing, editing and

revision, the teacher guides the students to practice writing in a planned and step-by-step manner on practical and interesting topics. Secondly, the peer mutual evaluation method is adopted to improve the evaluation confidence and relieve the students' negative evaluation anxiety. Peer review is one of the important components of process writing. In short, it allows students to participate in the whole process of composition revision through peer review.

In a nutshell, the above solutions are feasible and reliable ways to overcome writing comprehension and achieve the ideal writing performance of the students.

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