

Effects of Emotions on Second Language Writing from Positive Psychology Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In the realm of second language writing, the effects of other emotions are still not well understood, despite the fact that anxiety has been thoroughly researched. Utilizing the theoretical framework of positive psychology, this research investigated the effects and predictive capacities of foreign language writing anxiety (FLWA) and foreign language writing enjoyment (FLWE) on second language writing performance. This study was conducted through the integration of questionnaires alongside a continuation writing test among a group of 100 second-year high school students from a high school located in central China. The findings demonstrated a positive correlation between FLWE and writing scores, implying that elevated levels of writing enjoyment are associated with superior writing outcomes. In contrast, FLWA showed a negative relationship with writing scores, suggesting that heightened anxiety leads to reduced writing proficiency. Subsequent regression analyses revealed that FLWE positively predicted writing scores, while FLWA negatively influenced them. These findings not only provide a new perspective on the study of second language writing, but also offer an empirical basis for pedagogical strategies. Such understanding aids educators in comprehending the student writing process more deeply, thereby enhancing instructional efficacy.

Keywords: Positive psychology, Emotions, Second language writing.

1. INTRODUCTION

As a crucial component of linguistic expression, second language writing has been a major area of pedagogical attention and a significant educational challenge, holding a vital place in the field of second language learning (Chang & Chang, 2020). This mode of writing encompasses a variety of dimensions including cognition, emotion, thought creation, and social interaction (Zhou & Wang, 2022). A topic that has long piqued attention in fields like psychology and sociology, emotion is essential to writing in a second language. However, the influence of emotions beyond anxiety in this context has received limited attention and discussion. Furthermore, existing studies have yielded inconsistent findings regarding the effects of anxiety on second language performance (Kim & Pae, 2021; Li et al., 2023). Continuation writing, a task recently incorporated into the National Matriculation English Test, is widely employed. Such writing exercises involve students in crafting a story that lacks a conclusion, necessitating the

application of their comprehension of the content. (Gui & Yang, 2023). Additionally, continuation writing integrates language comprehension and output, suggesting it can effectively enhance learners' language skills (Wang, 2012; Wang & Qi, 2013). Therefore, it merits further systematic study.

This research, rooted in the principles of positive psychology (PP) (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), aimed to explore the effects and predictive roles of foreign language writing anxiety (FLWA) and enjoyment (FLWE) in the context of continuation writing tasks.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Continuation Writing

Prior research on continuation writing has scrutinized the factors influencing its quality. In 2018, Yang's research investigated the impact of ongoing writing on the rhetorical skills of EFL students at both intermediate and advanced stages. The research showed that this technique

significantly improved the rhetorical sophistication of EFL students' compositions. This motivated them to inventively replicate and modify complex language structures from the original content, thereby enabling them to create a language that exceeded their current skillset. Gu et al. (2022) contended that learners become more engrossed in the text when they are familiar with a subject, whereas new topics can broaden their vocabulary. They assessed the level of linguistic adaptation and the quality of writing in three different types of continuation exercises: narrative, expository, and argumentative. These tasks were based on texts from the same group of language learners. Zhang et al. (2023) observed that students uniformly matched the input texts in lexical application across various genres, ensuring a uniform quality in their results. Furthermore, Zhou and Du (2024) highlight the significance of affective engagement in continuation writing tasks, suggesting that there is a positive relationship between the depth of cognitive engagement and the efficacy of language use and narrative continuation.

2.2 Emotions in L2 learning from PP Perspective

It is posited that emotions are intrinsically linked to the writing process, significantly impacting both the writing practices and the quality of the output (Li et al., 2023). The most widely studied emotion in second language writing is anxiety. Cheng (2004) took the initiative to develop and validate the second language writing anxiety inventory (SLWAI) among 421 English majors. Kim and Pae (2021) found that L2 writing anxiety had a significant and direct negative impact on L2 writing performance. Yet, this finding is at odds with Rahimi and Zhang's research, which revealed no link between anxiety in writing a foreign language and performance in different tasks. In contrast, Givendir E and Uzun (2023) noted that the high levels of anxiety among EFL students in second language writing could impede their working memory, potentially leading to a decrease in the complexity of their syntactic structures in writing. The integration of PP into research on second language writing has heightened scholars' emphasis on the importance of positive feedback and emotional variety in educational settings. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014, 2016) pioneered the development of the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale. Subsequently, Li et al. (2018) recognized a three-part structure for enhancing foreign language enjoyment (FLE) among Chinese high school

students and supported the Chinese version of the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale as a dependable assessment instrument. Moreover, Li et al. (2023) verified the presence of varied emotions—namely, enjoyment, boredom, and anxiety—in the realm of foreign language learning. Both the Foreign Language Writing Enjoyment Scale (FLWES) and the Foreign Language Writing Boredom Scale (FLWBS) were developed and confirmed to measure the enjoyment and boredom associated with writing among learners of foreign languages. These emotional responses are shaped by myriad learner-internal and teacher-associated factors, including language proficiency, perceptions of the teacher, and classroom methodologies (Li et al., 2018). Han and Xu's (2020) qualitative research highlights the dynamic and unique characteristics of these emotions, centering on four EFL students from a Chinese university, thus underscoring the vital importance of emotional control tactics in writing. Taking these elements into account, the research seeks to explore the impact of anxiety and enjoyment on the continuation writing activity of high school students. Correspondingly, the present research aims to address the following two research questions:

1. What are the levels of high school students' writing anxiety, enjoyment?
2. What are the relationships between writing anxiety, enjoyment and writing achievement?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

The research was conducted at a high school located in a county in central China, engaging 100 students in their second year, who were from two distinct classes. The cohort included 53 females (53%) and 47 males (47%).

3.2 Instruments

3.2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) was developed based on the Foreign Language Writing Enjoyment Scale (Li et al., 2023) and the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (Cheng, 2004), utilizing a 5-point Likert scale format. The Foreign Language Writing Enjoyment Scale (FLWES) comprises 9 items, for instance, "I am interested in writing in English", while the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI)

includes 22 items, such as "I often feel panic when I write English compositions under time constraint." The questionnaires were administered in the English classroom, and data were subsequently collected. The Cronbach's alpha for FLWES was .821, for FLWAI was 674.

3.2.2 Continuation Writing Task

The continuation writing task was given to students during class. They had 45minutes to finish this exercise. The task in this study required students to produce two paragraphs based on the given fragments of a full article. Initial sentences were offered to students to write. The word length of this task is about 150 words. The students' achievements in this continuation writing task served as a gauge for their writing skills, with scores ranging from 0 to 25. After collecting their compositions, two skilled English teacher evaluated and mean score is kept as the final score. If there was a discrepancy of 5 points or more in their assigned grades, they would discussed and reevaluate the compositions.

3.2.3 Data analysis

In order to investigate the correlation between writing emotions, specifically enjoyment and

anxiety, and writing achievement, a series of Pearson correlation analyses were initially conducted. These were subsequently followed by multiple linear regression analyses. In each regression analysis, the independent variables consisted of the previously mentioned two emotions to writing, and the dependent variable was the score received for the continuation writing task.

4. RESULTS

In response to the first RQ, "Table 1" revealed that the level of writing enjoyment exceeded the medium threshold (22.5). The primary reasons for this result are that during the composition process, students would gain a sense of achievements. What's more, the writing task gives them a chance to express themselves and have the opportunity to write their own thoughts out. Conversely, the anxiety level among students surpassed the medium benchmark (55). The high level of anxiety stemmed from students' apprehension about receiving negative feedback from their teachers. Moreover, some students are not confident enough, so they would self-doubt regarding their writing capabilities.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (N=100)

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
FLWE	100	12	41	27.28	5.343	28.547
FLWA	100	45	83	67.36	8.849	78.314
Score	100	1	24	11.76	6.390	40.831

In addressing RQ2, Pearson correlation analysis was performed on the second language. As illustrated in "Table 2", there is a positive correlation between FLWE and writing achievement ($r=.905$, $p<.001$). This suggests that as participants' FLWE increases, their performance improves. Conversely, FLWA has a negative

correlation with writing achievement ($r=-.379$, $p<.001$), indicating that higher levels of FLWA are associated with poorer performance. Furthermore, there is a significant negative correlation between FLWE and FLWA ($r = -.230$, $p <0.05$). This suggests that as participants' writing anxiety increases, their enjoyment decreases, and vice versa.

Table 2. Correlations between all measured variables

	1	2	3
1 FLWE	1		
2 FLWA	-.230*	1	
3 Score	.905**	-.379**	1

a *.Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

b **.Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation results prompted a further regression analysis to ascertain the predictive roles of the two emotions on writing achievement. The findings are presented in Table 3. The proposed model fit the data well ($R=.915$, adjusted $R^2=.838$, $F= 250.808$, $p< .001$). FLWE positively predicted

writing achievement ($\beta=.849$, $t=20.158$, $p<.001$), while FLWA negatively predicted it ($\beta=-.193$, $t=-.193$, $p<.001$). Notably, FLWE exerted a greater predictive influence on writing achievement compared to FLWA.

Table 3. Multiple regression coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(constant)	-6.570	2.743		-2.395	.019
FLWE	1.016	.050	.849	20.158	<.001
FLWA	-.139	.030	-.193	-4.577	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Score

5. DISCUSSION

The present study offers valuable insights into the role of emotions in second language writing, viewed through the lens of positive psychology. The descriptive statistics revealed that both enjoyment and anxiety were present at relatively high levels. From the questionnaire survey, it can be learned that the Foreign Language Writing Enjoyment (FLWE) primarily stemmed from a sense of achievement of students during writing process and their opportunity for self-expression. Nevertheless, the Foreign Language Writing Anxiety (FLWA) was mainly derived from a fear of negative feedback from teachers and self-doubt regarding their own writing abilities.

Findings of this research also indicate that FLWE and FLWA are key indicators of writing proficiency in second language learning among Chinese high school students. The observed positive correlation between Foreign Language Writing Enjoyment (FLWE) and writing proficiency, in conjunction with the negative correlation between Foreign Language Writing Anxiety (FLWA) and writing proficiency, corroborates prior scholarly work that underscores the pivotal role of affective states in shaping language learning outcomes, as articulated by Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) and Li et al. (2018). However, these findings are conflicted with the research conducted by Rahimi and Zhang (2019), which failed to recognize a significant correlation between FLWA and writing proficiency. This discrepancy may be attributed to the different dependent variables used in the two studies; in the current investigation, the dependent variable is

constituted by the scores on writing assessment, contrasting with Rahimi and Zhang's research, which employed measures of linguistic complexity and accuracy as their indicators. Findings from this study suggest that students who have greater pleasure in writing are likely to show improved writing abilities. Conversely, the negative impact of FLWA on writing performance highlights the detrimental effects of anxiety on cognitive processes, which can result in reduced syntactic complexity and overall writing quality (Güvendir E & Uzun, 2023).

The regression model further reveals that Foreign Language Writing Enjoyment (FLWE) positively predicts writing achievement ($\beta=.849$, $t=20.158$, $p<.001$), while Foreign Language Writing Anxiety (FLWA) negatively predicts it ($\beta=-.193$, $t=-.193$, $p<.001$). This finding contrasts with Li et al.'s study (2023), where FLWA did not predict writing performance. The discrepancy may be attributed to differences in sample size ($N=100$ in the present study; $N=1036$ in Li et al., 2023) and age group ($M=17.3$ in the present study; $M= 12.46$ in Li et al., 2023). Additionally, the present research reveals a vibrant interaction between FLWE and FLWA, suggesting a link between heightened anxiety and reduced pleasure, and the other way around. The notable discovery indicates that strategies targeting the reduction of writing anxiety could concurrently boost the pleasure derived from writing, possibly resulting in better writing outcomes. The varying forecasting abilities of FLWE and FLWA regarding writing success highlight the significance of nurturing positive feelings in language learning environments.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study underscores the pivotal role of affective factors in second language composition, deepening our understanding of the impact of Foreign Language Writing Enjoyment (FLWE) and Foreign Language Writing Anxiety (FLWA) on the efficacy of writing performance.

The positive effects of enjoyment and the negative effects of anxiety on writing outcomes underscore the need for educational techniques that foster enjoyable writing tasks and alleviate anxiety. Educators are advised to use methods that boost student involvement and pleasure, including the integration of creative writing activities, offering positive feedback, and aiding in handling writing-related anxiety. By adopting this method, educators can cultivate an environment conducive to writing, which in turn improves writing skills and promotes the overall well-being of students. However, this study has several limitations. Firstly, the sample size is relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Subsequently, the omission of interviews within this research may lead to a dearth of in-depth, nuanced data that could elucidate the participants' viewpoints, incentives, and personal encounters. Lastly, the use of self-report measures to assess participants' emotions may be influenced by individual interpretations and biases. Therefore, future research should continue to explore the complex relationship between emotions, writing performance, and educational interventions. By understanding and addressing the emotional aspects of writing, educators can more effectively guide students in reaching their full potential in composing texts in second languages.

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APPENDIX A

1. I am fully engaged when writing in English.
✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree
2. I feel a sense of achievement in English writing.
✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree
3. The English teacher's praise motivates me to write in English.
✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree
4. I always look forward to the English teacher's feedback on my English writing.
✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree
5. We are always encouraged to write more in English by the English teacher.
✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree
6. My thoughts become jumbled when I write English compositions under time constraint.
✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree
7. I often feel panic when I write English compositions under time constraint.
✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree
8. I do my best to avoid situations in which I have to write in English
✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree
9. I don't worry at all about what other people would think of my English compositions.
✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree
10. I'm not afraid at all that my English compositions would be rated as poor.
✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree
11. I tremble or perspire when I write English compositions under time pressure.
✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree
12. I feel my heart pounding when I write English compositions under time constraint.
✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree
13. I usually feel my whole body rigid and tense when I write English compositions.
✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree
14. I freeze up when unexpectedly asked to write English compositions.
✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree
15. My mind often goes blank when I start to work on an English composition.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree

16. I would do my best to excuse myself if asked to write English compositions.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree

17. Whenever possible, I would use English to write compositions.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree

18. I usually seek every possible chance to write English compositions outside of class.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree

19. I enjoy putting what I have learned into English writing.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree

20. I feel confident in English writing.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree

21. I am interested in English writing.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree

22. I am fully motivated whenever writing in English.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree

23. I often choose to write down my thoughts in English.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree

24. I usually do my best to avoid writing English compositions.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree

25. Unless I have no choice, I would not use English to write compositions.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree

26. I don't worry that my English compositions are a lot worse than others'.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree

27. I'm afraid that the other students would deride my English composition if they read it.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree

28. I'm afraid of my English composition being chosen as a sample for discussion in class.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree

29. While writing in English, I'm not nervous at all.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree

30. If my English composition is to be evaluated, I would worry about getting a very poor grade.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree

31. While writing English compositions, I feel worried and uneasy if I know they will be evaluated.

✧Strongly agree ✧Agree ✧Unclear ✧Disagree ✧Strongly disagree