

# Investigating Chinese EFL Learners' Writing Strategies and Emotional Aspects

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| Received<br>16/07/2021   | <b>Abstract</b><br><br>The purpose of this study was to explore the use of writing strategies, namely, planning, execution, monitoring and revising by Chinese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners in their English writing. It also investigated the emotions of Chinese EFL writers in terms of anxiety and enjoyment as well as how the employment of writing strategy was linked to the emotional aspects. A mixed method approach was employed to collect both the quantitative and qualitative data from the participants. A total of 54 Chinese undergraduates were given the Foreign Language Writing Strategy Survey Questionnaire (FLWSSQ) and the Foreign Language Writing Emotion Survey Questionnaire (FLWESQ). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a selection of participants. Results show that EFL learners report a moderate level of frequency use of writing strategies and a moderate level of anxiety and enjoyment of EFL writing. Moreover, the use of writing strategies is positively correlated with participants' writing enjoyment. Since writing strategies and emotion are crucial factors influencing students' perception and behaviors regarding writing, the current study provides some insights into understanding students' use of writing strategies and |
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|  | emotional experiences in an EFL context. It also suggests some pedagogical implications for teaching L2 (Second Language) writing through strategy-based instruction and activating positive emotion in classrooms. |
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Introduction

Writing is an important skill that all language learners should develop (Baghbadorani & Roohani, 2014). As a productive language skill, writing essentially facilitates the intellectual development and academic success of learners (Gere, 1985). During writing, writing strategies can be seen as particular processes or techniques that writers use to improve their writing (Bai, 2015). Meanwhile, writing is an emotional as well as cognitive activity in which we think and feel while we are writing (Cheng, 2002).

Early Second Language (L2) strategy research mainly focused on the identification, description, and classification of language learner strategies. This body of research aims to find out how good and poor language learners differ in strategy choice (Zhang, 2003). Consequently, the early work witnesses the emerging of some taxonomy of strategies (Rubin, 1981; O'Malley et al., 1985). Later, a wealth of studies has been conducted to examine the extent to which the strategies are actually being used (Cohen, 2014) in different language skill areas and the predictive effects of strategy use on language proficiency. Results from previous studies have suggested, in EFL teaching, L2 strategy use has been shown to predict EFL learners' English proficiency (Wang & Bai, 2017). Zhang (2003) points out that it seems that almost all the studies have tried to establish correlations between learner strategies and language learning achievements.

Students experience a range of discrete emotions during learning activities (Zumbrunn et al., 2019). Early studies mostly focused on the negative face of emotion, with anxiety being the most studied topic (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Previous research has led to the conclusion that language learning anxiety is one of the strongest predictors of success or failures in Foreign Language (FL) learning (MacIntyre, 1999). On the other hand, stimulated by positive psychology (PP), language learning enjoyment has become an emerging trend in Second Language Acquisition

(SLA) literature with a shifting focus toward positive emotions and their roles as driving forces (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016).

Researchers have expanded the scope of strategy research by investigating specific types of strategies related to specific language skills (Zhang et al., 2019), for instance, writing. However, while L2 writing researchers have exclusively investigated the relationship between L2 writing strategy and observed writing competence or descriptive analysis of language anxiety and enjoyment in general language learning contexts, little attention has been given to how students' writing strategy use relates to their emotional experience, specifically focusing on writing anxiety and enjoyment holistically. Wang (2021) recently attempted to establish the link between the employment of writing strategy and anxiety among international Chinese learners in China. Through questionnaire surveys and interviews, she found a negative correlation between advanced Chinese learners' writing strategy utilization and anxiety. Taken together, work on this issue in an EFL learning context remains relatively insufficient.

Concerning these issues, the current study aims to investigate what types of writing strategies are used by Chinese EFL learners and the anxiety and enjoyment they experience in the EFL writing process, as well as how their writing strategy use relates to the anxiety and enjoyment in writing. To achieve these goals of the current study, the following research questions are formulated:

1. What types of writing strategies do Chinese EFL learners use in their L2 writing?
2. What types of emotion do Chinese EFL learners experience during their L2 writing?
3. How is Chinese EFL learners' writing strategy use related to their emotional aspects?

## Literature Review

### Writing Strategies

A strategy is some form of activity used in response to problems when and where they arise (Cohen & Macaro, 2007). Language learning strategies (LLS) are behaviors that contribute to developing learners' language system as well as affecting learning directly (Rubin, 1994). Writing strategies refer to thoughts and behaviors that writers consciously

select and use to improve their L2 writing development (Oxford, 2016). Scholars offer different classifications of writing strategies. Oxford (1990) divides writing strategies into two broad categories, direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies include memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies, while indirect strategies consist of metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. On the other hand, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classify writing strategies into four classes, namely, cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective strategies.

Originally, research on writing strategies grows out of the “process writing” approach (Manchón, 2001). In adopting this approach, writing is considered to be a series of strategic actions involving multiple strategic behaviors in the writing process (Harris et al., 2010). For example, Negari (2011) argues that writing involves a number of cognitive and metacognitive activities, including brainstorming, planning, outlining, organizing, drafting, and revising. Zhang et al. (2016) developed one writing strategy training programme in Singapore in which planning, execution, monitoring and revising strategies were explicitly taught to the participants. Planning strategies are purposely used by writers in the forethought phase of writing, such as organizing intended ideas and emotion regulation. Execution pertains to actual writing behavior, assisting with thinking of writing samples, language features, etc. During writing tasks, monitoring strategies allow writers to identify problems or weaknesses of their writing performance and use alternative strategies accordingly. Revising strategies involve critically reading one's writing to notice discrepancies with the idea text, and making changes.

One factor that may shape the use of writing strategies is individual differences (Teng & Huang, 2019). Cer (2019) states that individuals require certain strategies for planning, designing, organizing, revising, and evaluating writing. Bailey (2019), for example, found that English majors in South Korean universities had a higher propensity for planning strategies than non-English majors in L2 writing. Using the think-aloud protocol and immediate retrospective interviews, Chien (2012) compared the writing strategy used by high and low achieving Chinese EFL student writers, and found that high-achieving students focused more on planning, generating, revising and editing their written texts. Bailey (2019) surveyed South

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Korean university students and found that the participants' writing anxiety affected their writing strategy use.

## **Emotion in L2 Writing**

Cognitive psychologists in the field of writing research have recognized the importance of motivation and affect in writing processes (Cheng, 2002). Calls for research emphasize the need for understanding students as affective beings and how emotion can influence their learning (Meyer & Turner, 2006).

### ***Language Anxiety in L2 Writing***

To examine the scope and severity of foreign language anxiety (FLA) in general, Horwitz et al. (1986) firstly developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). As for writing, initially, writing anxiety was termed as "writing apprehension" by Daly and Miller (1975) to describe the dysfunctional anxiety that many individuals have suffered while confronted with writing tasks. They further developed the Writing Apprehension Test (WAT), which is the most widely used measurement instrument of L2 writing anxiety. WAT was originally developed with reference to English native speakers. However, according to Matsuda & Gobel (2004), FL writing anxiety is a more specific type of anxiety, closely related to the language-particular skill of writing. From this perspective, researchers who disputed the benefits of WAT claimed that it had neglected the essential aspects of L2 writing. In order to address this claim, Cheng (2004) proposed the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), including three subscales: Somatic Anxiety, Cognitive Anxiety and Avoidance Behavior. More specifically, somatic anxiety is associated with physiological arousal writers experience; cognitive anxiety pertains to the mental element of anxiety dealing with writers' worry or concern of negative evaluation; and avoidance behavior refers to writers' refusal or resistance to writing.

Regarding the level of L2 writing anxiety by learners, studies held in EFL contexts have shown mixed findings. Dar & Khan (2015)'s study on Pakistan undergraduates showed that over 60 percent of the participants had an average level of English language writing anxiety. This finding contrasted with Wahyuni and Umam (2017)'s study on Indonesian EFL

college learners, which revealed that more than half of the participants reported high levels of writing anxiety. In their study, cognitive writing anxiety was the dominant type of writing anxiety.

### ***Language Enjoyment in L2 Writing***

To balance the research that has been carried out on negative emotions, researchers in the field of SLA have recently shifted the focus to positive academic emotions. Encouraged by the development of PP, the role of language learning enjoyment has been valued in the process of FL acquiring (Mierzwa, 2019). In 2014, Dewaele and MacIntyre introduced the Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) questionnaire with 21 items in total through analyzing learner's responses worldwide.

MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) argue that positive emotion has a different function from negative emotion, which may lead to better learning outcomes. As for writing, most of the previous research suggested a positive relationship between writing enjoyment and writing achievement (Zumbrunn et al., 2019). For example, Graham et al. (2012) found that elementary students who reported a high level of enjoyment in writing tended to produce longer and higher-quality texts.

### ***Writing Strategy and Emotion***

Pekrun et al. (2002) claim that positive academic emotions could facilitate the use of flexible, creative learning strategies including elaboration, organization, critical evaluation, and monitoring. In the literature, there are studies examining the effects of learners' emotions on learning strategy use in general (Hayat et al., 2020; Mega et al., 2014). Regarding writing, He (2019) mentioned that personality acted as an antecedent of writing strategy use. Extraversion writers who experience less psychological negative affect than introversion ones tend to use cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and social-affective strategies more frequently. Another research by Bailey (2019) identifies the relationship between writing strategy categories and writing anxiety based on a questionnaire survey of South Korean university students. In this study, students' L2 writing anxiety had a positive correlation with the self-reported use of planning, problem-solving, and corrective feedback strategies. Despite the aforementioned studies, there is still a dearth of

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research that targets the possible correlation between writing strategy use and the emotional aspects of Chinese EFL writers.

## Methodology

The present study employed a mixed-method research design aiming at investigating the writing strategies used and the emotions experienced by Chinese EFL learners, and examining how students' use of writing strategies is related to their emotional aspects.

### Participants

Fifty-four sophomores majoring in English, 6 males and 48 females, at one university in Central China were invited into this study (ages:  $M = 19.46$ ,  $SD = .794$ ). They were conveniently sampled from 2 intact classes. The participants were enrolled in one regular writing course lasting 90 minutes each week. Recruiting English majors is due to two concerns. First, English majors are expected to write academic English in all their courses and for their final thesis throughout the whole undergraduate study. The goal of the current research is to investigate strategy use and emotional aspects in relation to writing in English. Therefore, predicative research findings from this study could bring potential benefits to them. Second, compared to English majors, students otherwise might not have wealthy English writing experiences to provide rich information on their emotional experiences regarding L2 writing. In terms of years of studying English, half of them had studied more than 11 years. The other half had studied 6-10 years. Only one student had experience of studying abroad. Regarding self-report writing competence, 26 students (48.1%) evaluated them as low, 27 students as intermediate (50.1%) and only one of them rated themselves as high-intermediate (1.8%).

### Instruments

#### *Writing Task*

To elicit participants' responses, they were asked to engage in an actual writing task in one regular writing class. The argumentative essay asked them to express their opinions on campus love. The rationale behind

topic selection is based on the following concerns. First, task-related factors are taken into account. Argumentative writing was chosen because this genre is more cognitively demanding and may trigger more writing strategy use from writers. Second, topic-related factors were taken into consideration. This chosen topic is familiar and authentic to college students, which allows them to assess their own unique linguistic, cultural, and social experiences. Students were asked to first read the instruction and then write an essay within 50 minutes with a 200-word limit.

### ***Questionnaires***

All the participants were invited to complete three questionnaires. The first questionnaire comprised 6 close-ended questions to gather participants' background information such as age, gender, years of studying English, experience of studying abroad and self-evaluated English writing ability and overall English competence.

The second questionnaire is the Foreign Language Writing Strategy Survey Questionnaire (FLWSSQ), which includes 40 statements trying to elicit respondents' writing strategy use. The strategy use session included four subcategories: planning (14 items), execution (9 items), monitoring (7 items) and revising (10 items). The FLWSSQ was adapted and modified from Zhang et al. (2016)'s Writing Strategy Survey Questionnaire. One advantage of this questionnaire is it is specialized in investigating only writing strategy use rather than an overarching language studying strategy.

The third is the Foreign Language Writing Emotion Survey Questionnaire (FLWESQ). It was a 33-item questionnaire including two domains, namely, writing anxiety and writing enjoyment. The writing anxiety part had 22 items containing three subcategories which were somatic anxiety (7 items), cognitive anxiety (7 items) and avoidance behavior (8 items). This questionnaire was adapted and modified from the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) by Cheng (2004). The writing enjoyment part was composed of 11 items containing three subcategories which were private (5 items), teacher related (3 items) and atmosphere related (3 items) enjoyment. It was adapted from the Chinese Version of the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (CFLES) by Li, Jiang, and Dewaele (2018). These two questionnaires have been implemented in a Chinese EFL context and show high reliability.



The points were calculated by using the 5-point Likert scale from 1 to 5 (e.g., Strongly Disagree = 1, Strongly Agree = 5). To facilitate the reading and responding processes, all of the items in FLWSSQ and FLWESQ were translated into Chinese, which is the L1 of the respondents, by the researcher and rechecked by the writing course instructor.

About reliability, the original coefficient of the FLWSSQ and FLWESQ is .915 and .840, suggesting an acceptance of the questionnaires' internal reliability. However, within the writing enjoyment domain, the observed Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of atmosphere-related enjoyment was .259, which was not acceptable. This meant that this subscale was not suitable for inclusion for further analysis. Thus, the three items were excluded from the current inventory. Finally, the Cronbach's internal consistency reliability of the FLWESQ was .860.

### *Semi-structured interviews*

Interviews are particularly valuable as they can reveal issues and hidden messages that might be difficult to predict. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews could help interviewees to express them more freely (Hyland, 2013). The semi-structured interviews were carried by the researcher online to discover in-depth information necessary for the findings elicited from the questionnaires. The interview was semi-structured and conducted in Chinese, enabling the participants to express themselves freely and openly. Seven interviewees were enrolled because they showed great willingness to participate in the interview voluntarily. Guided by the research questions, the semi-constructed interviews consisted of two major categories: strategy use and emotion in English writing. In order to get diverse answers from students, 3 open questions about writing strategy use and 3 open-ended questions about writing anxiety and enjoyment were developed. The questions were: "Could you please recall how you learned English writing in China? What is the most common writing strategy you have used while writing English? What are the factors that may have influenced your writing strategy use? Is there any specific event or episode in your EFL writing class that you really enjoyed? Is there a specific event or episode in your EFL writing class that

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is bringing anxiety to you? Would you mind sharing some examples with me?”

Each interview, averaging 25 minutes in length, was individually constructed through Tencent online meeting program in their free time late the same week after the essay writing. The interview data was audio-recorded and transcribed. Besides, the researcher took notes during the online interview.

### **Procedure and Data Analysis**

First, the participants completed the essay writing as a normal classroom activity embedded in their regular writing class session. Right after the writing task, the three questionnaires were administered to the participants to assess their writing strategy use and emotion. To mitigate the survey fatigue, an interval was given to the participants between their answering of the writing strategy questionnaire and the emotion questionnaire. Later in the same week, online interviews were conducted with each interviewee individually.

As for data analysis, first, information from the background questionnaire was analyzed descriptively. Next, Cronbach  $\alpha$  coefficients were calculated to ensure the internal reliability of the quantitative data extracted from FLWSSQ and FLWESQ. As mentioned before, the overall coefficient of reliability of the writing strategy questionnaire is .915, with four subscales ranging from .653 to .860, showing a high degree of reliability. Next, the overall Cronbach  $\alpha$  coefficient of the emotion questionnaire is .860 with 30 items indicating that the emotion instruments are sufficiently reliable in terms of internal consistency. Then, descriptive statistics of the FLWSSQ and FLWESQ were conducted to investigate the participants' strategy use and emotions in English essay writing. Finally, correlation analysis was used to clarify the relationship between learners' writing strategy use and emotional aspects. All the mentioned analyses of quantitative data were administered by using the Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS26) for Windows. Regarding qualitative data, based on Cresswell (2009)'s qualitative data analysis approach, all the transcripts were firstly read through by the researcher to get a general sense and overall meaning of the information. Next, the data

was analyzed in detail through a coding process in which categories and themes were identified.

Results

Results for Research Question 1

To answer the first research question, descriptive statistics analysis in FLWSSQ was administered, including frequency, mean, standard deviation, etc. The frequency ratings for writing strategy use were identified by Oxford (1990)’s criterion prescribing 3.5-5.0 as high, 1.5-3.4 as moderate and 1.0-1.4 as low.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics by Writing Strategies*

| Subcategories | Mean  | SD   | Min   | Max   | Level of Frequency Use | Rank |
|---------------|-------|------|-------|-------|------------------------|------|
| Planning      | 3.291 | .349 | 2.315 | 4.519 | Moderate               | 2    |
| Execution     | 3.432 | .371 | 1.907 | 3.889 | Moderate               | 1    |
| Monitoring    | 3.146 | .417 | 2.296 | 4.000 | Moderate               | 3    |
| Revising      | 2.974 | .405 | 2.074 | 3.852 | Moderate               | 4    |
| Total         | 3.218 | .512 | 2.148 | 4.065 | Moderate               | 2    |

Overall, Table 1 showed that EFL students reported a moderate level of frequency use of writing strategies, among which execution was the most frequently used strategy, followed by planning strategies and monitoring strategies. Revising strategies were the least used.

Looking into execution strategies specifically, the students reported using previously learnt language knowledge while writing the most often ( $M = 3.888$ ,  $SD = 0.984$ ). The next most-mentioned strategy was writing down their ideas ahead of revising language ( $M = 3.740$ ,  $SD = 1.135$ ). The least used strategy by the participants was making up new words while confronting words with ambiguous meaning ( $M = 1.907$ ,  $SD = 1.103$ ). Table 2 presents the complete results for each item on the execution strategy scale.

Table 2

*Execution Writing Strategies Used by Chinese EFL student*

| Writing Strategies: Execution   | Mean  | SD    | Level of Frequency Use |
|---|-------|-------|------------------------|
| When writing an English composition, I put down my ideas first and improve the language later.                        | 3.74  | 1.135 | High                   |
| When writing an English composition, I use words, phrases or sentences that I have read before.                       | 3.888 | 0.984 | High                   |
| When writing an English composition, I use ideas that I read before.  | 3.203 | 1.139 | Moderate               |
| When writing an English composition, I use details to support/elaborate on the main ideas.                            | 3.388 | 0.898 | Moderate               |
| When writing an English composition, I make sure that my sentences are linked to one another.                         | 3.722 | 0.81  | High                   |
| When writing an English composition, I make sure that my paragraphs are well linked.                                  | 3.722 | 0.833 | High                   |
| When I do not know a word or phrase in writing an English composition, I stop writing and look it up in a dictionary. | 3.74  | 1.2   | High                   |
| When I cannot think of an English word  | 3.574 | 1.02  | High                   |
| When writing a composition, I paraphrase it.  |       |       |                        |
| When I do not know the right words to use, I invent new words.  | 1.907 | 1.103 | Low                    |

For planning, the respondents reported that they always read about the topic carefully before writing ( $M = 4.518$ ,  $SD = 0.636$ ). Besides, they often listed ideas before starting to write ( $M = 3.648$ ,  $SD = 1.515$ ). However, they seldom told themselves to enjoy the writing process before beginning to write ( $M = 2.314$ ,  $SD = 1.241$ ). The complete results for each item for planning were displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3***Planning Writing Strategies Used by Chinese EFL students*

| <b>Writing Strategies: Planning</b>   | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>Level of Frequency Use</b> |
|---|-------------|-----------|-------------------------------|
| I read good English compositions (model compositions) in order to write well.                                   | 2.870       | .932      | Moderate                      |
| Before I write an English composition, I tell myself to enjoy writing.  | 2.314       | 1.241     | Moderate                      |
| Before I write an English composition, I tell myself not to worry.  | 2.981       | 1.124     | Moderate                      |
| Before I write an English composition, I make sure that I understand what I have to do.                         | 3.463       | 1.004     | High                          |
| Before I write an English composition, I think about the purpose of writing it.                                 | 3.481       | 1.111     | High                          |
| Before I write an English composition, I read about the topic.  | 4.518       | .636      | High                          |
| Before I write an English composition, I think about who will read it.  | 2.777       | 1.238     | Moderate                      |
| Before I write an English composition, I think about what ideas to write about by listing them.                 | 3.648       | 1.151     | High                          |
| Before I write an English composition, I think about what words, phrases and sentences to use.                  | 3.370       | 1.202     | Moderate                      |
| Before I write an English composition, I recall a similar text type I read before and try to follow it.         | 2.833       | 1.041     | Moderate                      |
| Before I write an English composition, I write out an outline for it.   | 3.129       | 1.259     | Moderate                      |
| Before I write an English composition, I use graphic organizers (such as mind maps) to help me plan my writing. | 2.796       | 1.365     | Moderate                      |

The most frequently used writing strategy about monitoring by the students was grammar checking ( $M = 4.000$ ,  $SD = .971$ ) and structure checking ( $M = 3.703$ ,  $SD = 1.075$ ). The least mentioned monitoring strategy was readability checking by reading aloud ( $M = 2.296$ ,  $SD = 1.222$ ). Details for each item of the monitoring strategy can be found in Table 4.

**Table 4***Monitoring Writing Strategies Used by Chinese EFL students*

| Writing Strategies: Monitoring  | Mean  | SD    | Level of Frequency Use |
|---|-------|-------|------------------------|
| After finishing my composition, I make sure that it meets the expectation of the writing task.    | 3.592 | 1.073 | High                   |
| After finishing my composition, I make sure that it has a beginning, the main body and an ending. | 3.703 | 1.075 | High                   |
| When I check my English composition, I make sure that the grammar is correct.                     | 4.000 | .971  | High                   |
| When I read my composition, I think about whether my readers will like it.                        | 2.481 | 1.077 | Moderate               |
| When I check my English composition, I change the ideas in it.                                    | 3.111 | 1.075 | Moderate               |
| When I revise my English composition, I reorganize the ideas in it.                               | 2.833 | 1.041 | Moderate               |
| When I check my English composition, I read it aloud to make sure that it reads well.             | 2.296 | 1.222 | Moderate               |

As for revising, learners often checked the spelling and punctuation ( $M = 3.851$ ,  $SD = .998$ ) and changed some words or phrases after writing if necessary ( $M = 3.629$ ,  $SD = .937$ ). However, they rarely asked for comments on their writing from their peers ( $M = 2.074$ ,  $SD = 1.096$ ). Table 5 showed the complete results of each item in the domain of revising strategies.

**Table 5***Revising Writing Strategies Used by Chinese EFL students*

| Writing Strategies: Revising   | Mean  | SD   | Level of Frequency Use |
|--|-------|------|------------------------|
| When I revise my English composition, I make sure that the spelling and punctuation are correct. | 3.851 | .998 | High                   |
| When I revise my English composition, I change words or phrases.                                 | 3.629 | .937 | High                   |

|   |       |       |          |
|---|-------|-------|----------|
| When I read my English composition, I think about whether my reader can understand it.  | 3.018 | 1.090 | Moderate |
| I think about the strengths and weaknesses of my composition after I have written it.   | 2.444 | 1.040 | Moderate |
| I ask my friends for comments after I have written my composition.  | 2.074 | 1.096 | Moderate |
| I reward myself (e.g., eating my favorite food or playing computer games) when I have completed an English composition.                     | 2.259 | 1.261 | Moderate |
| I read my teacher's corrections and comments carefully and try to learn from them.  | 3.592 | .901  | High     |
| I ask myself whether my writing ability is improving.   | 3.203 | .898  | Moderate |
| I ask myself whether my writing quality is getting better.  | 3.259 | .894  | Moderate |
| I look out for opportunities to write in English (e.g., keeping journals/diaries, blogs, book reviews, etc.) to improve my writing ability. | 2.407 | .942  | Moderate |

The first research question examined the type of writing strategy used by Chinese EFL undergraduates. The first finding is that Chinese EFL students appeared to have a moderate frequency of writing strategy use, which is consistent with De Silva (2010)'s overall findings that the frequency of strategy use of undergraduates in Sri Lanka was moderate. The second finding is that revising has the lowest total strategy use. Qualitative data from interview allows us to investigate the possible causes. None of the seven interviewees mentioned any strategies they had used after writing. Instead, they frequently mentioned strategies they had used before and while writing. Some students gave their own explanations.

I rarely make an evaluation of my writing products. Besides, I have never thought of getting feedback from classmates because I think completing and submitting my essay is the end of the writing task. (S6)

I have to finish my writing within a time limit; thus, I prefer to spend more time planning and outlining the main ideas before beginning to write. When the genre type of the writing task is unfamiliar to me, I know it will take me more time to prepare. (S5)

About execution, the students reported using previously learnt language knowledge while writing the most often. Besides, they mentioned frequently that they preferred writing down the ideas in advance in the planning stage of writing. Additionally, the participants seldom invented new words while confronting words with ambiguous meaning. The interview data also supports the above findings.

I think I have low literacy in academic writing; thus, I only use words and phrases that I have known very well. (S3)

I always draw up an outline before writing. I usually make a list of viewpoints before I really start to write them down on paper. (S4)

About planning, the respondents claimed that they always read about the topic carefully before writing. However, they rarely regulate their emotions before beginning to write. Interview data also supports these findings.

I always read the title and instructions carefully because they inform me a lot. (S1)

I read the title and topic very carefully and follow it strictly because it tells me the genre and target structure of the passage I should write. (S6)

About monitoring, the excerpts suggested that grammar checking had the highest total use. All the 7 interviewees mentioned their use of this strategy. Regarding revising, qualitative data showed that correcting spelling and punctuation was most frequently used strategy. Almost all the interviewees mentioned they had used this strategy after writing.

## Results for Research Question 2

To answer the second question, descriptive statistics were computed. The results of frequency, mean and standard deviation of subscales within anxiety and enjoyment are shown in Table 6 respectively.



Table 6

*Descriptive Statistics by Writing Emotion*

| Subcategories        | Mean  | SD   | Level of Frequency Use | Rank |
|----------------------|-------|------|------------------------|------|
| Writing Anxiety      | 3.168 | .650 | Moderate               |      |
| 1.Somantic           | 2.720 | .944 | Moderate               | 3    |
| 2.Avoidance behavior | 3.481 | .732 | Moderate               | 1    |
| 3. Cognitive         | 3.298 | .843 | Moderate               | 2    |
| Writing Enjoyment    | 3.332 | .521 | Moderate               |      |
| 1.Private            | 2.733 | .713 | Moderate               | 2    |
| 2.Teacher-related    | 4.530 | .619 | High                   | 1    |

The writers reported a moderate level of anxiety and enjoyment in their writing. Among the participants, feelings of enjoyment were slightly more prevalent than anxiety. This could be attributed to the high mean score for teacher-related enjoyment (4.530). This finding is consistent with Jiang and Dewaele (2019)’s study in which the mean score of FLE is slightly higher than FLA of Chinese EFL learners.

Looking into writing anxiety specifically, the first finding was students reported a moderate level of anxiety regarding EFL writing. This finding echoes Dar & Khan (2015)’s research on Pakistani university students. Regarding the dominant type of writing anxiety, the participants reported more avoidance behavior and cognitive anxiety than somatic anxiety. This finding is contrasted with evidence from Iranian EFL students who reported cognitive anxiety as the most common type of anxiety (Jebreil et al., 2015). Based on the mean scores of seven items about avoidance behavior, most of the students avoid writing down their thoughts in English. Besides, they rarely seek opportunities to practice English writing after class. Interview data supports these findings.

I feel anxious when I am unfamiliar with the essay topic.  
(S1)

I am afraid of making mistakes or errors. Sometimes, I did not come up with any ideas until the end of the writing task. (S3)

I feel anxious when my classmates' essays are chosen as good samples by my teacher instead of mine. (S4)

I think I have low L2 writing competence. This made me anxious. (S7)

Furthermore, the respondents reported a moderate level of EFL writing enjoyment. In the subcategory of enjoyment, participants experienced a much higher degree of teacher-related enjoyment than private ones. This result is consistent with Jiang and Dewaele (2019)'s study of Chinese undergraduates revealed that FLE was more likely to be evoked by teacher-related sources. A similar finding could be noticed in a recent study on Chinese high school students that they scored highest on the teacher-related FLE dimension (Li et al., 2020). Qualitative data from interviews throws further light on this finding. Teacher-related enjoyable episodes were reported frequently by interviewees.

In my writing class, I feel happy when my teacher shares some interesting stories with us. (S2)

A moment I feel happy is when my teacher shares a good sample essay with me. Gaining new knowledge makes me happy. (S3)

My teacher's personality is interesting. He is funny and knowledgeable. Not as boring as I thought. (S6)

### Results for Research Question 3

To answer the third question, Pearson correlations were computed between participants' writing strategy use and writing anxiety and enjoyment. The results are reported in Table 7.

Table 7

*Correlations between Writing Strategy Use and Emotional Aspects*

|                    |             | Anxiety | Enjoyment |
|--------------------|-------------|---------|-----------|
| Writing Strategies | Correlation | -.110   | .332*     |
|                    | Sig.        | .428    | .014      |
|                    | N           | 54      | 54        |

The results showed that participants’ writing strategy use was significantly correlated with their writing enjoyment, indicating that students employing more writing strategies are more likely to experience a higher level of enjoyment in their English writing. Interestingly, the result is in contrast with Bailey (2019)’s research on South Korean university students. In this survey study, participants’ writing anxiety was found to be positively correlated with their writing strategy use, indicating moderate levels of writing anxiety may compliment writing strategy use. However, in the current study, students’ anxiety degree didn’t show correlations with their writing strategy use. The data from the interviews is useful in interpreting this finding.

When I have learnt new writing methods and skills, I feel happy and satisfied. Moreover, I feel happy when I complete an essay. It gives me a sense of accomplishment. (S3)

I feel happy when I learn new knowledge about writing. For example, I have learnt to be aware of word choice. I have also learnt how to clarify the logic order of my essay to readers. (S4)

I think the vocabulary recitation competition is fun and useful. This activity helps me remember both the meaning and the English explanations of the vocabulary. (S5)

Discussion

About writing strategy use, Manchón and De Larios (2007) claim that several writer-external factors may influence writers’ strategy use: task-related factors and topic-related factors. First, some interviewees

mentioned that time constraints were an influencing factor for their writing strategy use. Take revising strategy as an example. One explanation of the ineffective use of revising behaviors may be due to the nature of the cross-sectional research design. In the current study, participants wrote essays only once. Such an assignment design provides no further opportunities for students to make revisions to their written drafts. Second, under time pressure, participants would merely pay attention to the surface level of their writing, for example, spelling, grammar and punctuation instead of the meaning level. Third, some interviewees said the genre type would influence their choice of writing strategy. A deep reason is that their teachers tell them that different types of essays require different language use and essay structures. Finally, the familiarity and difficulty of the writing topic also impact their strategy resourcing. If they are familiar with the topic, they prefer including some advanced vocabulary and extra materials into their writing. However, the unfamiliarity of the content would impose much more difficulty on their writing. In this case, they turn to using simple and easy vocabulary that they have known very well to avoid errors. Taken together, external factors may impact learners' writing strategy use.

Regarding emotional aspects, Clark (2005) indicates that writing anxiety occurs because writers lack knowledge necessary to complete the writing task. Successful writing requires knowledge of how to do effective writing. During this procedure, practicing writing is important. The frequency of practicing writing will affect the writing itself. Thus, inadequate writing practice will make the writing more difficult. Next, the high level of teacher-related enjoyment is not surprising in a teacher-dominated EFL class in which teachers tend to lead the whole learning process. Under this condition, students tend to rely heavily on the teacher's instructions, feedback, and assessments.

Findings in the third research question implied that writer-internal factors might interact with writers' strategy use. Writing is a prolonged and self-sustained activity requiring a lot of self-regulation from writers (Graham & Harris, 2000). Positive emotions, like enjoyment while writing, may help sustain students' self-regulatory behaviors (Graham, 2018). Moreover, interview excerpts suggested that gaining new knowledge about writing and acquiring effective writing strategies had evoked students' positive emotional experiences. First, they apply the writing strategy knowledge to their own writing practice, in which their self-

regulation ability increases. Then, students experience a sense of achievement through the process of self-evaluation. In sum, as students take writing courses and benefit from the use of writing strategies, they are not only cognitively engaged but also emotionally involved.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the writing strategies used and academic emotions experienced by Chinese EFL writers and identify the possible relationship between writing strategy use and emotional aspects of them. With regard to writing strategy use, overall the participants reported a moderate level of writing strategy use. Specifically, execution and planning strategies were used more frequently than revising. Regarding writing emotion, participants reported more enjoyment than anxiety. In addition, participants reported higher levels of avoidance behaviors and teacher-related enjoyment than other subtypes. Finally, their writing strategy use and writing enjoyment showed a positive correlation.

The current study explored learning strategies and emotions in a specific area of language skills, namely writing, which adds to the existing knowledge of language learning strategies and emotion research. The findings also shed light on the possible interaction between writing strategies and emotional aspects, indicating that EFL writing needs to be regarded as both a cognitive and an affective process when being researched.

Several limitations in this study should be acknowledged. First, the participants in the current study were English majors with a relatively high English proficiency. Thus, the findings of this study may not be generalized to all Chinese EFL learners. Therefore, future research could expand its target population to those with different language proficiency levels. Second, the long survey in this study may cause response fatigue, which in turn can deteriorate the data quality. Thus, to reduce the burden of answering questions, the length of the questionnaire and question ordering should be taken into account while designing a survey. Third, this study overly relied on students' self-reported writing strategy use at a given time. One single writing task may not guarantee the successful use of writing strategies, for instance, revising. Thus, multiple writing tasks in

a longitudinal study should be encouraged to answer the research questions precisely.

Despite the limitations, the current study provides several pedagogical implications. First, the insufficient use of revising strategies suggests a need to teach such strategies explicitly to undergraduate EFL writers. As students relied much on teachers' instructions, teachers could organize and provide classroom activities to help students become aware of the methods and importance of revision to their writing. In this way, students might realize that writing is not only product-oriented but also process-oriented and the process is ongoing and recursive. Additionally, they might find that their teacher is not the only source of valuable feedback. Second, to escape from the anxiety of failing such obligatory writing tasks, students tend to avoid practicing writing in English out of their writing classroom. Therefore, to support students affected by writing anxiety, teachers should be supportive and try to create a relaxing and positive learning environment. In the classroom context, students should not be burdened with obligatory writing tasks administered by teachers and curriculum. Instead, students should be encouraged to work towards more active writing. Finally, the positive correlation between writing strategy use and enjoyment reminds teachers that mindful strategy-based writing instructions may be helpful for EFL writers to manage their writing anxiety and enjoyment, which, in turn, will help them become less anxious writers to develop stronger writing skills.

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## Appendix A

### Foreign Language Writing Emotion Survey Questionnaire (FLWESQ)

#### Writing Anxiety

- 1 I feel my heart pounding when I write English compositions under time constraint.
- 2 My mind often goes blank when I start to work on an English composition.
- 3 I tremble or perspire when I write English compositions under time pressure.
- 4 My thoughts become jumbled when I write English compositions under time constraint.
- 5 I often feel panic when I write English compositions under time constraint.
- 6 I freeze up when unexpectedly asked to write English compositions.
- 7 I usually feel my whole body rigid and tense when I write English compositions.
- 8 I often choose to write down my thoughts in English. (R)
- 9 I usually seek every possible chance to write English compositions outside of class. (R)
- 10 Whenever possible, I would use English to write compositions. (R)
- 11 I would do my best to excuse myself if asked to write English compositions.
- 12 I usually do my best to avoid writing English compositions.
- 13 I do my best to avoid situations in which I have to write in English.
- 14 Unless I have no choice, I would not use English to write compositions.
- 15 While writing in English, I'm not nervous at all. (R)
- 16 While writing English compositions, I feel worried and uneasy if I know they will be evaluated.

17 I don't worry that my English compositions are a lot worse than others'.  
(R)

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

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

20 I don't worry at all about what other people would think of my English compositions. (R)

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

22 I'm not afraid at all that my English compositions would be rated as very poor. (R)

### **Writing Enjoyment**

23 I don't get bored with English writing. (R)

24 I enjoy English writing.

25 I've learnt interesting things from writing in English.

26 In class, I feel proud of my accomplishments of English writing.

27 It is fun to write English compositions.

28 There is a positive environment of writing in English around me.

29 My classmates in writing courses are kind to me.

30 We form a tight writing group.

31 The teacher of my writing course is encouraging.

32 The teacher of my writing course is friendly.

33 The teacher of my writing course is supportive.