

A Study on the Effect of L2 Grit and Foreign Language Writing Anxiety on Junior High School Student's Writing Achievement

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Abstract: The introduction to grit into the second language acquisition has motivated scholars' attention to learners' personal traits in language learning. Prior studies mainly focus on the relationship between grit and academic achievement and target the group of college students. However, against the backdrop of emphasis on cultivating individuals' abilities to comprehensively apply English in China, it is crucial to further explore the integration between L2 grit and specific language skills. Therefore, this study selects 83 junior high school students as research subjects, and combines L2 grit with writing, a specific language skill. It attempts to explore the effect of L2 grit and foreign language writing anxiety on writing achievement among junior high school students. The findings revealed that students' L2 grit and foreign language writing anxiety are moderate. There are significant correlations between L2 grit, foreign language writing anxiety and writing achievement. Besides, L2 grit and foreign language writing anxiety predict writing achievement significantly. L2 grit's predictive effect is greater than foreign language writing anxiety. Finally, some practical implications and suggestions for future research are in discussion.

Keywords: L2 grit, Foreign Language Writing Anxiety, Writing Achievement, Junior High School Students

1. Introduction

As the research on positive psychology in second language acquisition goes deeper, grit, a positive personal trait, and its roles in language learning have received more and more attention^[1]. Besides, in response to the requirements of promoting students' ability to comprehensively utilize language as tools, more and more educators focus on the cultivation of specific English skills. In order to explore the important role of grit in language learning, a great deal of research has investigated the influence of grit on English academic achievement^[2]. However, few research integrates grit with specific language skills. What's more, most of the studies focus on college students and few of them put junior students on research core. Therefore, it is of great necessity to explore the roles of L2 grit in cultivating students' language skills in basic education. This study aims to investigate the effects of junior high school students' L2 grit and foreign language writing anxiety on their writing achievement based on the control-value theory, which is expected to offer practical implications for teachers in better cultivating students' writing skills.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definitions of L2 Grit and Foreign Language Writing Anxiety

Grit, a positive personality trait, was first put forward by Duckworth, representing the perseverance and passion for long-term goals^[3]. As research goes deeper, the applications of domain-general measurement of grit may lead to inconsistent findings in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). Therefore, on the basis on previous research, Teimouri et al. proposed the concept of second language grit (L2 grit), entailing consistency of interest (CI) during L2 learning and perseverance of effort (PE) to achieve L2 goals in L2 learning^[4].

Daly and Wilson regarded writing anxiety as a manifestation of individuals' nervous feelings and tendency to avoid during the writing process^[5]. To further analyze writing anxiety in detail, Cheng made a further classification and pointed that foreign language writing anxiety is a relatively stable anxiety associated with writing, involving dysfunctional thoughts, increased physiological arousal and discomfort in behaviors during the writing process. It will trigger writing difficulties or learners' negative emotional experience^[6].

2.2. Relationships among L2 Grit, Foreign Language Writing Anxiety, and Writing Achievement

A lot of scholars pay more attention to investigate the relationship between L2 grit and foreign language anxiety^[7], instead of focusing on academic emotions in specific foreign language skills, like writing anxiety. The research on relationships between L2 grit and foreign language writing anxiety is still deficient. Some existing research has exhibited a negative correlation between L2 grit and foreign language writing anxiety. The two dimensions of L2 grit are also negatively correlated with foreign language writing anxiety. Furthermore, previous research also shows that L2 writing grit significantly negatively predict L2 writing anxiety^[8]. However, the research on relationships between the two, especially among the junior high school students, is still for further investigation.

Regarding the relationships between foreign language writing anxiety and writing achievement, quantities of scholars argue that writing anxiety negatively predicts writing achievement, but a positive impact of anxiety on writing achievement is also exhibited^[9]. Besides, most of Chinese research focus on students in college or senior high school rather than junior high school. Hence, it is necessary to further investigate the relationship between the two variables of Chinese junior high school students.

In addition, there are quantities of research on the relationship between L2 grit and foreign language academic achievement rather than writing. Regarding the relationships between L2 grit and writing achievement, previous international findings show a significant positive correlation between PE, one of the two factors of L2 grit, and the writing achievement. PE can directly or indirectly predict writing achievement^[10]. The predictive effect of CI on writing achievement is not significant. Therefore, the relationships between L2 grit, the two dimensions of it, and writing achievement are still for further exploration, especially in Chinese context.

In summary, research on the relationships between the three variables is limited. It mainly targets the students from university and senior high school. Therefore, the study aims to investigate the impact of L2 grit and foreign language writing anxiety on junior high school students' writing achievement.

2.3. The Control-Value Theory

Pekrun proposed the control-value theory, according to which control and value are proximal antecedents of emotions experienced by learners in achievement situations. Control appraisals are regarded as perceptions of one's ability to perform actions successfully and to achieve the desired result. Value appraisals embody the level of significance attributed to activities and results^[11]. Based on the theory, learners' emotions experienced in learning situations can affect their cognition, motivation and adjustment process in two aspects.

2.4. The Present Study

This study aims to explore the relationships between the three variables, and investigate the impact of L2 grit and FLAW on writing achievement. The three research questions are as follows:

- (1) What are the general profiles of senior high school students' L2 grit and foreign language writing anxiety?
- (2) What are the relationships among L2 grit, foreign language writing anxiety and writing achievement?
- (3) How do L2 grit and foreign language writing anxiety predict writing achievement?

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

The study just selects junior high school students in Grade 9 as research participants since students in Grade 7 and 8 seldomly participate in specific writing exercises. Convenience sampling in a middle school in northern China was adopted in this study. A total of 90 questionnaires were distributed and returned, among which 83 were valid with the effective response rate of 92%. Among the participants, there are 36 males and 47 females who start learning English as a second language from the third grade in primary school and never study abroad. Moreover, six of them are randomly invited to participate in the semi-structured interview.

3.2. Instruments

L2 Grit Scale and Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory were utilized in this study. Additionally, participants' writing scores for the final exam issued by local education department with guaranteed reliability were also collected. A semi-structure was also conducted to deeply understand participants' real thoughts.

3.2.1. L2 Grit Scale

Teimouri's L2 Grit Scale was utilized to measure participants' level of L2 grit^[4]. The scale consists nine items with two dimensions: perseverance of effort (PE) and consistency of interest (CI). Each item is presented in the form of 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not like me at all) to 5 (very much like me). In this study, the internal consistency of the scale is ideal (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.858$). Specifically, the internal consistency of PE and CI are 0.855 and 0.729 respectively.

3.2.2. Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory

Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) translated and validated by Guo Yan and Qin Xiaoqing was employed to test the level of participants' foreign language writing anxiety (FLWA)^[12]. The scale contains four aspects: Classroom Teaching Anxiety (CTA), Conceiving Anxiety (CA), Avoidance Behavior (AB), and Lack of Confidence (LC), rated by a 5-point Likert scale. The Cronbach's α of SLWAI is 0.891, indicating a relatively high internal consistency. The Cronbach's α of CTA, CA, AB and LC were 0.782, 0.865, 0.792 and 0.710 respectively.

3.2.3. Semi-Structured Interview

The present study also utilized semi-structured interview to better comprehend the characteristic of students' L2 grit and FLWA, supplementing the quantitative data. Six students were randomly invited to participate in the face-to-face interview.

3.3. Procedure

The study was carried out during the latter half of the academic year 2023-2024 in one junior high school in Northern China. With the help of head teachers, the questionnaires were distributed to participants from two classes in grade 9 in junior high school. At the beginning, the confidentiality principle of research data was told to participants. Then, a brief introduction to the research and the requirements was illustrated. After that, participants completed the questionnaires carefully according to their real feelings. After analyzing the quantitative data, an outline of semi-structured interview was designed. Six of the participants were randomly and voluntarily invited to participate in the interview face to face.

3.4. Data Analysis

The cleaned quantitative data were analyzed through SPSS 27.0. Descriptive analysis was utilized to investigate the general profiles of L2 grit and FLWA. Pearson correlation analysis was used to explore the correlations between L2 grit, FLWA and their writing scores. To further explore the impact of L2 grit and FLWA on writing achievement, regression analysis was also employed. The face-to-face semi-structured interview with recording in Chinese was conducted after the quantitative data analysis. Finally, the transcription of the recordings in this interview was translated in English. According to the grounded theory, the texts were coded and then used as the supplement for quantitative data.

4. Results

4.1. General Profiles of Junior High School Students' L2 Grit and FLWA

In response to the first research question, descriptive analysis was conducted. Table 1 offers a comprehensive overview of the results.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of L2 Grit and FLWA (N=83)

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviations	Skewness	Kurtosis
L2 Grit	3.25	0.57	-.233	-.226
PE	3.00	0.75	.061	-.337
CI	3.58	0.69	-.371	-.599
FLWA	2.92	0.71	-.183	-.547
CTA	2.47	0.91	.352	-.211
CA	2.76	1.00	-.150	-.793
AB	3.44	0.87	-.231	-.722
LC	2.92	0.91	.016	-.726

Note: PE= Perseverance of effort; CI= Consistency of interest; FLWA= Foreign Language Writing Anxiety; CTA=Classroom Teaching Anxiety; CA= Conceiving Anxiety; AB= Avoidance Behavior; LC= Lack of Confidence. The same as below.

As depicted in Table 1, junior high school students' L2 grit (M=3.25, SD=0.57) and FLWA (M=2.92, SD=0.71) are both at a medium level. To be more specific, the mean score of PE and CI are 3.00 and 3.58, demonstrating that participants' PE is at a medium level, while the level of their CI is higher. Additionally, the sub-dimensions of FLWA are at various levels. Firstly, CTA is at a medium low level (M=2.47, SD=0.91), but the mean score of AB is 3.44, slightly lower than 3.50, suggesting that participants' AB level is at a medium high level. Besides, both CA and LC are at medium levels (M=2.76, SD=1.00; M=2.92, SD=0.91).

4.2. Correlations among L2 Grit, Foreign Language Writing Anxiety and Writing Achievement

In order to answer the second research question about correlations among the three variables, Pearson correlation analysis was used to investigate the correlations among junior high school students' L2 grit, foreign language writing anxiety and writing achievement. The results of Pearson correlation analysis are showed in Table 2.

Table 2 Correlations between L2 Grit, FLWA and WA(N=83)

	L2 Grit	PE	CI	FLWA	CTA	CA	AB	LC	WA
L2 grit	1								
PE	.915**	1							
CI	.850**	.565**	1						
FLWA	-.534**	-.450**	-.505**	1					
CTA	-.395**	-.285**	-.436**	.824**	1				
CA	-.421**	-.339**	-.418**	.892**	.814**	1			
AB	-.510**	-.467**	-.433**	.697**	.271*	.483**	1		
LC	-.280*	-.261*	-.231*	.648**	.464**	.400**	.279*	1	
WA	.598**	.570**	.478**	-.581**	-.384**	-.483**	-.529**	-.367**	1

Note: WA=Writing Achievement; * indicates that $p < 0.05$; ** indicates that $p < 0.01$

To begin with, there is a moderate and significant positive correlation between L2 grit and writing achievement ($r = .598$, $p < 0.01$). As for the sub-dimensions of L2 grit, both PE ($r = .570$, $p < 0.01$) and CI ($r = .478$, $p < 0.01$) are moderately and positively correlated with writing achievement.

In addition, L2 grit is negatively and significantly correlated with FLWA at a moderate level ($r = -.534$, $p < 0.01$). Both PE and CI, the two dimensions of L2 grit, also exhibit a moderate and negative correlation with FLWA significantly ($r = -.450$, $r = -.505$, $p < 0.01$). As for the sub-dimensions of FLWA, L2 grit is negatively and significantly correlated with CA and AB at a moderate level respectively ($r = -.339$, $r = -.467$, $p < 0.01$). However, L2 grit exhibits a relatively low and negative correlation with CTA and LC

($r=-.395$, $p<0.01$; $r=-.280$, $p<0.05$).

What's more, both of the two sub-dimensions of L2 grit show negative and significant correlations with the four sub-dimensions of FLWA respectively. Specifically, the negative correlations between PE and CTA, CA, LC are at a low level ($r=-2.85$, $p<0.01$; $r=-.339$, $p<0.01$; $r=-.261$, $p<0.05$). The correlation between PE and AB is at a moderate level ($r=-.467$, $p<0.01$), however. As for CI, it shows significantly moderate and negative correlations with one of the three dimensions of FLWA: CTA ($r=-.436$, $p<0.01$), CA ($r=-.418$, $p<0.01$) and AB ($r=-.433$, $p<0.01$) respectively. The level of the negative correlation between CI and LC is relatively low ($r=-.231$, $p<0.05$).

Moreover, it can also be seen from Table 2 that FLWA is significantly and negatively correlated with writing achievement at a moderate level ($r=-.581$, $p<0.01$). All of the four aspects of FLEA display negative and significant correlations with writing achievement. Specifically, the correlations between CTA, LC and writing achievement are at relatively low levels ($r=-.384$, $r=-.367$, $p<0.01$). Besides, CA ($r=-.483$, $p<0.01$) and AB ($r=-.529$, $p<0.01$) are negatively correlated with writing achievement at medium levels respectively.

4.3. Predictive Effects of L2 Grit, Foreign Language Writing Anxiety on Writing Achievement

As for the third research question, the regression analysis was employed among these variables on the basis of the significant correlations between the three variables demonstrated in 4.2.1. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Regression Analysis between L2 Grit, FLWA on WA (N=83)

	Model	Independent Variable(s)	Dependent Variable	β	R^2	F	p
L2 Grit→ WA	1	L2 grit	WA	.598	.357	44.997	<.001
	2-a	PE	WA	.570	.324	38.887	<.001
	2-b	PE	WA	.440	.326	22.530	<.001
		CI		.230			
FLWA→ WA	3	FLWA	WA	-.581	.338	41.345	<.001
L2 Grit, FLWA → WA	4-a	L2 grit	WA	.598	.357	44.997	<.001
	4-b	L2 grit	WA	.402	.453	33.157	<.001
		FLWA		-.367			

Note: WA=Writing Achievement

As depicted in Table 3, L2 grit can predict writing achievement positively and significantly ($\beta=.598$, $p<.001$). L2 grit can explain 35.7% of the variances of writing achievement ($R^2= 0.357$). When PE and CI, two aspects of L2 grit, entered into the stepwise regression analysis model as independent variables, it can be seen that PE and CI have significant and positive predictive effects on writing achievement ($p<.001$). To be more specific, PE and CI can jointly explain 32.6% of the variances of writing achievement ($R^2= 0.326$). It can be seen that PE has greater predictive effects on writing achievement than CI ($\beta= .440$, $\beta= .230$).

Regarding the relationship between FLWA and writing anxiety, FLWA can significantly and negatively predict writing achievement ($\beta= -.367$, $p<.001$). As the result shows, FLWA can explain 33.8% of the variances of writing achievement ($R^2= 0.338$).

Finally, as for the co-predictions of both L2 grit and FLWA on writing achievement, it is shown that when L2 grit and FLWA are input as independent variables in the regression equation in a stepwise method, both of them can significantly predict writing achievement ($p<.001$). The two variables can explain 45.3% variance of writing achievement jointly ($R^2= 0.453$). In detail, L2 grit has a greater effect on writing achievement than FLWA ($\beta= .402$, $\beta= -.367$).

5. Discussion

This study investigates the general profiles of L2 grit and FLWA, and explores correlations between L2 grit, FLWA and writing achievement, with the main purpose to investigate the effects of L2 grit and FLWA on junior high school students' writing achievement.

5.1. Discussion on the General Profiles of L2 Grit and Foreign Language Writing Anxiety

Regarding the first research question, the findings of this study show that junior high school students' L2 grit and foreign language writing anxiety are both at medium levels. As for the two aspects of L2 grit, PE is at a medium level; and CI is at a high level. The sub-dimensions of foreign language writing anxiety are all at medium levels, except for CTA, which is at a relatively low level.

The general profiles of L2 grit and foreign language writing anxiety align with previous research^{[4][13]} with the findings that CI shows a higher level than PE. This suggests that learners will be more arduous and persistent to improve their writing skills when their L2 grit is high enough. They will not be defeated by difficulties they meet in learning English writing, especially when they are more interested in it. What's more, most of Chinese junior high school students are required to increase their grades as much as possible because they will face the senior high school entrance examination. Therefore, they have to continue to engage more in learning English writing in order to improve their total scores. In addition, some of them are interested in learning English because of their hobbies and teachers' popular teaching styles. However, they still feel anxious during writing process due to some internal and external factors such as lack of confidence, poor grammar knowledge, worry for evaluation, and limited time for thinking, etc.

5.2. Discussion on the Correlations between L2 Grit, Foreign Language Writing Anxiety and Writing Achievement

When it comes to the second research question, the study reveals significant pairwise correlations between the three variables. To start with, there is a significant and positive correlation between L2 grit and writing achievement. Furthermore, both of the two factors of L2 grit are positively and significantly with writing achievement. It indicates that students' writing achievement will be improved if they insist on making great effort to learn English writing^[12]. Moreover, according to the interview data, if the writing topic or writing activities are out of students' interest, they might have much stronger power to write better in English.

In addition, L2 grit is negatively and significantly correlated with FLWA in line with previous research^[8]. Moreover, both PE and CI exhibit negative and significant correlations with FLWA, suggesting that junior high school students will be not very anxious when they write in English if they have put into much more efforts into learning English writing in their daily learning. Additionally, during the interview, a boy student shared his experience in a writing class:

"When we learnt about animals, the teacher assigned group work to design and write posters about animal protection. I am really interested in designing. Though I still felt nervous to finish the work in limited time, devoting myself in designing distracted my attention and relieve the sense of nervousness". (Student 1)

This qualitative finding provides evidence that if students are more interested in teachers' writing activities, they might feel less anxious due to their enjoyment in the class. The findings also further provide a support to the conclusion that the positive personality has positive and promoting effects on English learning^[14].

Finally, FLWA is negatively and significantly correlated with writing achievement. Students with higher foreign language writing anxiety may have lower writing scores. All of the sub-dimensions of FLWA also show negative and significant correlations with writing achievement, echoing the previous research^{[11][15][16]}. There are many external and internal factors leading to students' high level of writing anxiety according to the interview, such as limited time, physical discomfort, etc. There are some typical answers from the interview:

"Anxiety will affect my writing achievement a lot. When I wrote the passage in the mid-term exam, I feel so anxious that I cannot think any knowledge I've learnt. Hence, my score was not ideal." (Student 3)

"When I feel anxious to write in English, my brain becomes bland. I will sweat and worry that I cannot finish the writing or I will fail in this test. Finally, it becomes true. My scores of English writings are always very low." (Student 4)

5.3. Discussion on the effect of L2 Grit and Foreign Language Writing Anxiety on Writing Achievement

As for the third research question, the findings of the study demonstrate relationships between the three variables through regression analyses. It is revealed that L2 grit has a significant and positive effect on writing achievement, which is inconsistent with previous research^[17]. The possible reason is that students in senior high school write in English more frequently than those in junior high school, which may help them smoothly cope with various difficulties during writing process. However, those in junior high school do not have so many opportunities to practice, which signifies the important roles of their persistence and diligence. Besides, among the two aspects of 2 grit, only PE has a significant and positive effect on writing achievement. The positive effect of CI on writing achievement is not statistically significant. The qualitative data that most of Chinese students are not very interested in English writing but hard-working due to the expectations for higher grades from others can echo the result too. A typical instance is as follows.

“Though my writing achievement is relatively good in this semester, I am not interested in English very much actually. However, I have to study hard because of my parents and teachers often told me how important to get good grades in English writing. If I get lower scores in the writing part, my whole rankings in class will be down.” (Student 6)

Additionally, the FLWA can negatively and significantly predict writing achievement, aligning with previous research^{[18][19][20]}. A lot of students attempt to avoid writing in English when there is no requirement, which may result from the fact that Chinese students seldom apply English in their daily life because of a lack of English native language environment. Hence, they are not very adept at writing to express in English and they are afraid of others' negative evaluations. When they feel nervous during writing, they cannot utilize their acquired knowledge in time and form logical thinking, making them too anxious to perform well in writing.

Finally, L2 grit and FLWA can significantly predict writing achievement jointly. The former shows a greater predictive effect than the latter. According to the control-value theory^{[11][21]}, anxiety will occur if individuals feel a lack of control over the outcomes of important achievement activities^[22]. Subsequently, students will hold negative values on writing, leading to decline grades. On the contrary, L2 grit is a positive personal trait, representing individuals' recognition to the value of second language learning, which indicates that if individuals believe acknowledging English writing is important to their future development or academic success, they will engage more in writing, leading to the improvement of writing achievement. Moreover, students in Chinese junior high school need to get higher writing scores due to the competitive examination of entrance of senior high school, which is crucial in their future study. Therefore, they recognize the high value of the writing, which can prompt their internal motivations and make them engage more into learning writing and get ideal results finally. The strong willpower might also mitigate the negative effect of writing anxiety. Although students feel anxious, they can still improve their writing achievements through greatly diligent spirit and continuous efforts.

6. Conclusion

The study investigates the effects of L2 grit and foreign language writing anxiety on junior high school students' writing achievement. Firstly, it reveals that Chinese junior high school students have moderate levels of L2 grit and foreign language writing anxiety. Secondly, there are significant correlations between L2 grit, foreign language writing anxiety and writing achievement. Moreover, L2 grit and its two factors, PE and CI, can all positively predict writing achievement; foreign language writing anxiety predicts writing achievement negatively. L2 grit and foreign language writing anxiety can jointly predict writing achievement, among which L2 grit has greater contributions to the predictive effect than foreign language writing anxiety's effects on writing achievement.

Based on the findings, there are also some practical implications for basic education teachers. Firstly, they need to design various writing activities to cultivate students' interest in second language learning. When students achieve good outcomes, teachers can praise more for their persistent diligence rather than their talents, and they can also provide students enough scaffolds especially during the period of conceiving the outline of the article in writing class. Creating a supportive atmosphere in class and offering students positive feedback are also useful for teachers to increase students' positive feelings and relieve their anxiety.

Although the study provides some practical enlightenments, it still has some limitations. Firstly, the

sample size in this study is relatively small, which may be less representative. Besides, the participants of this research are only from one junior high school and one grade in Northern China. Future research can select more students from different regions in China to make the results more representative. Additionally, the research just focuses on one negative emotion in writing process. Future research can investigate more negative emotions (such as boredom, embarrassment) during second language writing process.

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