

Alleviating College Students' Writing Anxiety Through Online Collaboration to Improve Story Writing

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Abstract

College students who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) mostly perceive foreign language writing anxiety (FLWA) which is a detrimental factor influencing their writing outcomes. Little research, however, has focused on how instruction integrated with socio-digital technology can be designed to effectively reduce EFL college students' FLWA and enhance their story writing. Consequently, this study aimed to investigate the effects of online collaborative learning on EFL college students' FLWA and story writing performance. A total of 68 EFL college students participated in this study, with 35 in the experimental group and 33 in the control group. In the experimental group, online collaborative writing instruction was designed based on the socio-cultural theory, aiming to establish growth mindset learning experiences. A growth mindset is the belief that writing competence can be enhanced through learning and effort, which is vital for reducing students' FLWA. In the control group, traditional writing instruction was arranged. Data incorporated pre- and post-FLWA surveys and pre- and post-English story writing tests. The results showed that the experimental group students' FLWA reduced, and their English story writing performance improved after instruction. In contrast, no significant differences in FLWA and writing performance were found in the control group. Online collaborative writing instruction featuring elements of teamwork, peer feedback, and group discussion enabled the students to experience a growth mindset. Specifically, teamwork encouraged their persistence in writing; peer feedback with encouraging comments built their confidence; and

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group discussions helped them conceptualize writing strategies to overcome challenges. These elements promoted the students' positive self-perceptions of writing competence, further reducing their FLWA and enhancing their story writing. This study suggests that online collaborative writing instruction based on sociocultural theory can facilitate growth mindset learning experiences to reduce EFL college students' FLWA, thereby enhancing their English story writing.

Keywords: Collaboration, Foreign language writing anxiety, Growth mindset, Socio-digital technology, Story writing

Study Background

College students who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) frequently experience anxiety about their English writing tasks (Iksan et al., 2023; Kamal, 2023). This skill-specific type of anxiety is defined as foreign language writing anxiety (FLWA) referring to “a general avoidance of writing and [language learning situations] perceived by the individuals” (Hassan, 2001, p. 4). FLWA has negative impacts on students' writing outcomes (Iksan et al., 2023). The primary causes of EFL students' FLWA are their concerns about being evaluated, low self-confidence, and grammatical usage (Prasetyaningrum et al., 2021). These concerns are prevalent in traditional writing instruction focusing on assessment (Rabadi & Rabadi, 2020), individual tasks, and grammatical accuracy (Yu et al., 2020). Consequently, EFL college students, involved in traditional writing instruction, constantly receive negative language-use experiences, leading to a vicious cycle of FLWA (Lou & Noels, 2020).

To reduce students' FLWA, Lou and Noels (2020), based on the mindset theory, reported that students' language anxiety stems from self-perceptions of inadequacies in language competence and can be mitigated through growth mindset learning experiences. A growth mindset is the belief that “intelligence can be nurtured through learning and effort” (Ng, 2018, p. 2). Evidence shows that effective social interaction can facilitate growth mindset learning experiences (Laurell et al., 2021). With socio-digital advancements, socio-digital technology for a growth mindset learning context to alleviate students' FLWA requires further exploration. However, this focus remains understudied (Laurell et al., 2021). Accordingly, this study aimed to propose online collaborative writing instruction based on Vygotsky's social-cultural theory (1978) to create a growth mindset learning context for alleviating EFL college students' FLWA and improving their story writing. The results of this study can provide

valuable insights, informing instructional practices to reduce college students' FLWA. The two research questions are as follows.

RQ1. What are the effects of online collaborative writing instruction on EFL college students' FLWA?

RQ2. What are the effects of online collaborative writing instruction on EFL college students' English story writing performance?

Methodology

The participants were 68 EFL college students from two intact classes. One class was randomly assigned to the experimental group receiving online collaborative writing instruction ($N = 35$), while the other was the control group receiving traditional writing instruction ($N = 33$). Data was collected from pre- and post-FLWA surveys adapted from Cheng (2004), as well as pre- and post-English story writing tests before and after instruction. Both instructions lasted for five weeks.

Online collaborative writing instruction was designed based on Vygotsky's social-cultural theory (1978) to engage students in growth mindset learning experiences, encouraging them to overcome difficulties, establish confidence, and master writing (Figure 1). In this context, the students formed seven groups and used an in-house writing system, featuring three main functions of co-writing, peer assessment, and discussion forum, to engage in online social interaction in class. Firstly, the students in the same group used the co-writing function to write English story drafts synchronously. After finishing their drafts, they used the peer assessment function to review and evaluate the other groups' English stories, providing feedback and encouraging comments. Subsequently, the students reflected on peer feedback and exchanged ideas with group members on the discussion forum. Through reflection and discussion, they developed writing strategies to address their writing issues to gain mastery beliefs in story writing. It was expected that the students' FLWA would decrease, and their writing would improve after instruction.

In traditional writing instruction, the students wrote an English story individually. Afterward, they received feedback from the teacher. They decided whether to accept the feedback and revise their stories accordingly. To effectively revise their stories, they were allowed to search online for solutions to their writing issues. Lastly, the students were asked to write the final version of their English stories.

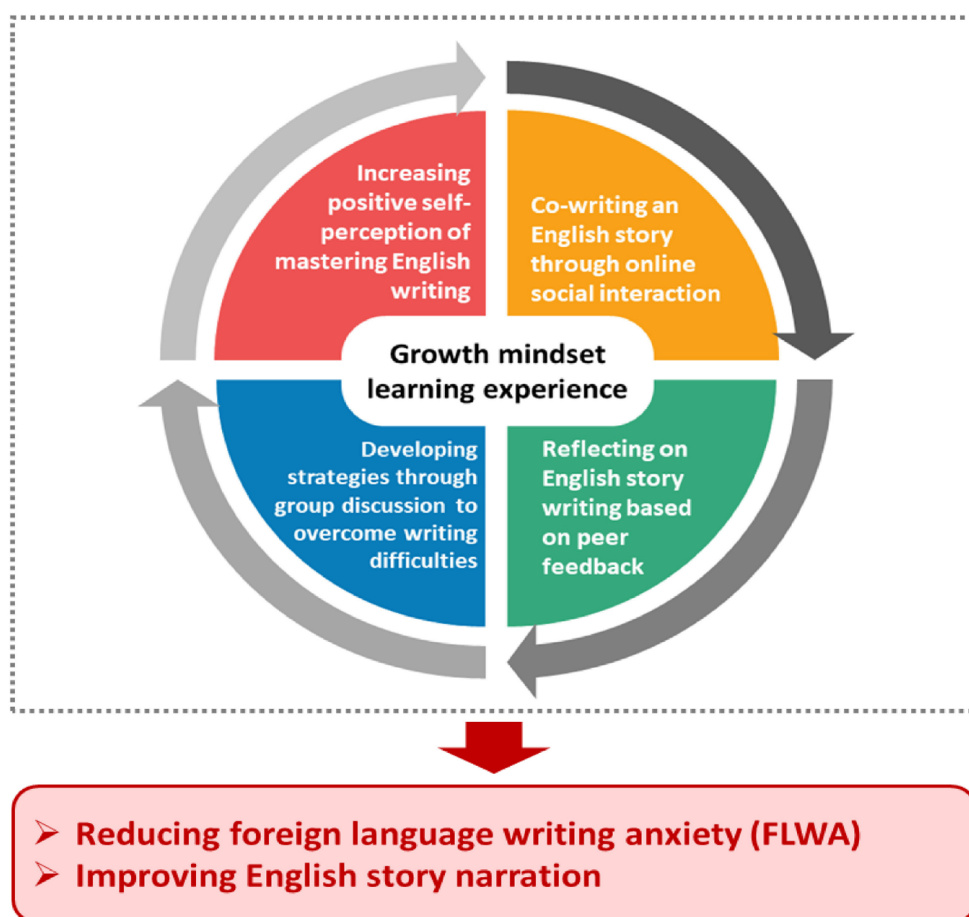


Figure 1. Online collaborative story writing instruction.

Table 1. Differences in FLWA and story writing performance between before and after instructions

Aspects	Groups	N	Pretest		Post-Test		Paired Samples <i>t</i> Test		
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Effect Size(<i>d</i>)
FLWA	Experimental group	35	67.51	11.16	60.46	9.88	5.777	0.000***	0.976
	Control group	33	70.58	12.81	72.48	11.67	-1.117	0.272	0.189
English story writing performance	Experimental group	35	3.91	0.818	4.77	1.00	-5.560	0.000***	0.968
	Control group	33	3.82	0.727	3.88	0.600	-0.812	0.423	0.141

Results

Table 1 shows the results of the paired samples *t* test, reporting that the experimental group's FLWA was significantly reduced, and their English story

writing performance significantly improved after instruction. Contrarily, in the control group, no significant differences were found in FLWA and writing performance before and after instruction. These results indicated that online collaborative writing instruction was more effective than traditional writing instruction in reducing FLWA and improving English story writing.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study revealed that compared to traditional writing instruction, online collaborative writing instruction more effectively alleviated EFL college students' FLWA and improved their story writing. Online collaborative writing instruction based on Vygotsky's social-cultural theory (1978) involved three key elements, namely collaborative writing, peer feedback with encouraging comments, and group discussion to develop writing improvement strategies. These elements are central to growth mindset pedagogy, encouraging students to persist in learning, conceptualize strategies to overcome writing challenges, and achieve learning goals (Rissanen et al., 2019). Accordingly, students gained positive self-perceptions of English writing and gradually reduced their FLWA, thereby enhancing their story writing.

Contrarily, traditional writing instruction, centering on individual learning and writing for assessment (Yang, 2018), was uncondusive to facilitating growth mindset learning experiences. This instruction relying solely on teacher support could make it difficult to provide instant assistance for each student in class. Consequently, when the students encountered writing difficulties, those who struggled to find solutions frequently gave up and perceived negative language-use experience, which further triggered their FLWA. These limitations explained why the control group students' FLWA remained and why they only made minimal progress with their story writing performance. Overall, this study suggested that online collaborative writing instruction could lessen EFL college students' FLWA and improve story writing.

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