Research Writing Anxiety among Engineering Postgraduate Students in Taiwan

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Abstract : Graduate-level writing practices have gained increasing scholarly attention in recent years. Due to its discipline-specific conventions and requirements, research writing can cause various levels of anxiety for native English speaking and English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) postgraduate students. Although many studies have investigated how writing anxiety can negatively affect writing performance, self-efficacy, and disciplinary discourse socialization process, relatively few have examined the impact of writing anxiety from the perspectives of postgraduate students in EFL contexts. This study aims to 1) examine the level of and the relationship between research writing anxiety and self-efficacy among Taiwanese EFL students at the master's and doctoral levels and 2) to uncover the causes of students' research writing anxiety. The data was collected from an adapted version of Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) and Research Writing Self-Efficacy Scale with 218 EFL graduate students in engineering-related fields at two research-oriented universities in Taiwan. A pilot study was conducted to ensure the construct and content validity of the instruments. Semi-structured interviews were also undertaken with 30 survey respondents to better understand the causes of their writing anxiety. The results revealed that while both master's and doctoral students had low to moderate research writing anxiety and self-efficacy, the doctoral students with more experiences in writing research papers in English were more anxious but not necessarily more confident than the master's students. A significantly weak negative correlation was found between the two constructs. The contributing factors for these results include different degree of writing exigency, perceived importance and types of writing tasks, writing for publication as graduation thresholds, and mentoring relationship with thesis/dissertation advisers. The study also identified several causes of graduate-level writing anxiety, of which writing under time constraints and concern on linguistic and rhetorical proficiency appeared to be the major concern. Pedagogical implications regarding facilitating graduate students' writing process and reducing anxiety will also be drawn.
Keywords : writing affect, writing anxiety, writing self-efficacy, EFL, postgraduate students