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THE INFLUENCE OF SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING ANXIETY ON L2 POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' DISSERTATION WRITING: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY

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Abstract:

Second language (L2) postgraduate students are susceptible to experience second language writing anxiety (SLWA) in dissertation writing as they tend to find the writing process arduous. SLWA relates to the recurring negative and anxious feeling when students write which could influence their cognition, behaviour, and physical condition. This reflects the interrelationship between individual's affect and cognitive process and the negative correlation between SLWA and writing performance reported in past studies. However, more evidence is needed to establish SLWA as an independent construct that could directly affect writing performance. Therefore, this study aimed to explore how SLWA influences L2 postgraduate students' dissertation writing to have a clearer insight into the phenomenon. This investigation utilised a multiple-case study approach involving four local postgraduate students. Data was obtained through in-depth interviews, audio journals, and personal document analysis. The thematic analysis revealed the following themes: SLWA i) influences emotional states; ii) triggers emotion regulation; and iii) initiates and sustains a debilitating or facilitative psychological loop that influences students' progress in dissertation writing. Thus, the study posits SLWA as a construct that can directly debilitate writing performance and L2 dissertation writing as having affective costs that makes emotion regulation an important mechanism to restore student's psychological balance. To overcome SLWA's influences on dissertation writing, it is recommended that supervisors and language teachers discourage perception of writing inability, recognize writing improvement, identify writing competence, suggest specific solutions to resolve writing issues, and avoid manipulating anxiety to provoke writing performance.

Keywords:

Writing Anxiety, Postgraduate Students, Dissertation Writing, Academic Writing, Multiple-Case Study

Introduction

Dissertation writing is often perceived as one of the main challenges in completing postgraduate study (Mohd Isa et al., 2018), and acquiring academic writing skills is viewed as vital for achieving timely completion (Hoon et al., 2019; Jeyaraj, 2020). However, postgraduate students with non-native English-speaking backgrounds often struggle with dissertation writing due to issues in language proficiency, academic writing, and academic reading skills (Bitchener, 2018; Jeyaraj, 2018). For instance, they may find it challenging to respond to academic texts, form arguments in writing, and synthesize and integrate information from multiple sources (Mohd Isa et al., 2018; Shahsavar et al., 2020). Hence, despite the increasing enrolment rates, the delayed graduation trend among Malaysian postgraduate students continues to persist (Sidhu et al., 2021), potentially exacerbated by the writing and reading difficulties they encounter, which seem to form a network of challenges (Phakiti et al., 2013). These challenges can impact their perceived writing competence and, in turn, their progress in writing (Litalien et al., 2015).

A frequently overlooked aspect is the linguistic and academic demands of writing a dissertation in a second language, which can also be anxiety-inducing for students, given that their academic success hinges on their writing skills (French, 2018) and language proficiency (Phakiti et al., 2013). For instance, in a quantitative study involving postgraduate students, the majority associated the highest level of second language writing anxiety (SLWA) with dissertation writing (Huwari et al., 2011). Although it is logical to reason that SLWA is simply the students' recognition that they are neither skilled nor linguistically proficient, students with good writing skills and good command of the language have also been observed to experience SLWA (Kelly et al., 2015; Genç et al., 2019). It appears that how students perceive their competence is more important than their actual competence, as they tend to assess negative outcomes when lacking self-belief, which could lead to SLWA and affect effort expenditure (Autman et al., 2017; Aytac-Demircivi, 2020). Importantly, existing studies have reported a negative correlation between SLWA and writing performance (Sabti et al., 2019; Saedpanah et al., 2020; Jin et al., 2021). Thus, SLWA can both result from and contribute to poor writing performance, potentially influencing students' writing progress. This study focuses on investigating the challenges faced by Malaysian postgraduate students in completing their dissertations. It specifically examines the linguistic and academic demands associated with dissertation writing in a second language, with a particular emphasis on understanding the influence of SLWA in hindering students' writing progress.

Literature Review

SLWA, as an inherent disposition, may persist whenever students attempt to write which could disrupt the writing process (McLeod, 1987; Woodrow, 2011). The emotion content in SLWA (the negative and anxious feelings) could arouse the amygdala (the emotion centre in the brain), initiating a self-sustaining loop that gives it greater prominence in conscious awareness (LeDoux, 2015). Under those circumstances, students' cognitive performance in writing could be less effective since they must divide their attention and cognitive resources between task-

related and self-related cognitions (Eysenck, 1979, as cited in MacIntyre, 1995; Buckert et al., 2012). As a result, it could influence the quality of their written outputs. Past studies have described apprehensive students' compositions as lacking quality (Saedpanah et al., 2020; Rohmah et al., 2021), less structured (Özkan et al., 2015; Ismail et al., 2010), contain grammatical and typographical mistakes (Abd Rahim et al., 2016), underdeveloped, shorter in length, and less clearly written (Badrasawi et al., 2016; Haddad, 2018).

Additionally, apprehensive students have also been reported to have low motivation, low self-confidence, low self-esteem, and low self-efficacy (Zabihi, 2018; Aytaç-Demirçivi, 2020; Yu, 2020). They demonstrate specific behavioural patterns such as procrastinating (Ismail et al., 2010), not acting on feedback (Lee et al., 2002), and avoiding writing activities (Zabihi, 2018). For this reason, apprehensive students may find it challenging to maintain enough drive and interest to continue improving their writing skills to maintain progress and ultimately, complete their dissertations. Hence, there is an urgent need to explore SLWA as a potential factor that could influence students' dissertation writing performance.

Nevertheless, researchers in the field have debated the effects of SLWA. While Horwitz (2010) contends that anxiety should only be seen as debilitating, Scovel (1978) argues that distinguishing between facilitating and debilitating anxiety could resolve ambiguous results, as facilitating anxiety motivates and emotionally prepares students to act. In this perspective, several studies have reported that SLWA motivates (Genç et al., 2019) and improves focus during writing (Miri et al., 2018). However, they struggle to separate the effects of facilitating anxiety from other constructs such as self-efficacy and self-esteem, which are extensively documented to initiate or encourage approach behaviours (MacIntyre, 2017). In short, it is challenging to determine the extent of the negative relationship between SLWA and writing performance and to explain what appears to be facilitating effects of SLWA (Teimouri et al., 2019), as little information is available on the underlying mechanism connecting SLWA to writing performance (Limpo, 2018).

Methodology

This study attempts to answer the following research question:

- i. How does second language writing anxiety influence postgraduate students' written output?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is based on Hayes' (1996) Social-Cognitive Model of Writing. This model highlights an interrelationship between individuals' cognitive processes and their motivation and affect. As an affective phenomenon, this connection reflects the nature of SLWA as both the cause (Genç et al., 2019) and the consequence of poor writing performance (Jafari et al., 2019). Hence, the framework delineates SLWA within the contextual framework of L2 dissertation writing, where potential contributing factors are traceable back to the writing process. These factors encompass aspects like working memory, long-term memory, cognitive processes, motivation, and affect, as well as the social and physical environment. In short, the framework offers a comprehensive perspective on SLWA to address the research question.

Selection of Participants

Participants were chosen via a two-phase purposeful sampling technique to ensure they represented typical cases, involving both an online survey and preliminary interviews. The first

section of the online survey gathers demographic information, including information on publication achievement, dissertation writing progress, writer's block, and perceived writing challenges. The second section features Cheng's (2004) Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), which was adopted in its original form, assessing the participants' trait SLWA levels based on three categories: cognitive anxiety (negative perceptions and expectations), somatic anxiety (physiological reactions), and avoidance behaviours (such as procrastination or avoiding writing situations). This inventory has been used in numerous studies (e.g., in Lau et al., 2014; Dar et al., 2015; Abd Rahim et al., 2016; Wahyuni et al., 2017; David et al., 2018; Zabihi, 2018; Genç et al., 2019; Nazari et al., 2019; Jin et al., 2021) with a reliability estimation of .91 for Cronbach's coefficient (Cheng, 2004). The survey included forty-four participants, from whom nine individuals were chosen for an initial interview, and four were ultimately selected as the research participants. The selection primarily focused on several attributes, namely, trait levels of SLWA (the inclination to experience anxiety while writing), perceived state of SLWA (actual experience of writing anxiety), proficiency in language, experience in academic writing, and progress in dissertation writing. High trait levels of SLWA, low language proficiency, limited experience in writing, and slow progress in writing have been associated with SLWA experience. Hence, in ensuring equal representation of cases, a comprehensive selection was conducted to recruit participants at various stages of dissertation writing, with different trait SLWA and English language proficiency levels (see Table 1). Some of the participants also had varying levels of academic writing experience.

Table 1: Brief Summary of Participants' Profiles

No	Pseudonym (Gender)	Age	Trait SLWA Level	English Language Proficiency	Dissertation Writing Progress	Publication Achievements
1	Nayla (F)	32	73 (High)	Band 4 (MUET)	Working on proposal (in her 10 th semester)	2 conference proceedings
2	Adam (M)	47	37 (Low)	Did not take MUET/ IELTS/ TOEFL but is a certified translator	Working on proposal (in his 3 rd semester)	2 research articles
3	Sophia (F)	29	33 (Low)	7.5 (IELTS)	Completed 3 chapters (in her 4 th semester)	None
4	Arwaa (F)	32	32 (Low)	Band 3 (MUET)	Working on proposal (in her 1 st semester)	None

Note: MUET stands for Malaysian University English Test.

Ethical Considerations

This study was granted ethics clearance by the University of Malaya Research Ethics Committee, Malaysia (UMREC). The participants are addressed by their pseudonyms in all form of written documents and publications (i.e., Nayla, Adam, Sophia, and Arwaa) to protect their privacy, confidentiality, and safety.

Data Collection

The study employed in-depth interviews, audio journals, and document analysis, conducting data collection over 24 weeks concurrently with the initial data analysis, as illustrated in Figure 1 (in the next page) depicting the data collection process flowchart. Within the designated timeframe, participants underwent seven interview sessions, spaced with intervals to prompt reflection and sharing of their SLWA and dissertation writing experiences. While permitted to use Malay (their mother tongue), they predominantly utilized English, interspersed with occasional colloquial expressions to convey their emotions. The researcher translated and transcribed all recordings, including audio journals. Consequently, the analysis of verbal data facilitated the researcher's understanding of how participants perceived and interacted with their worlds, given that their thoughts, emotions, goals, and beliefs are not directly observable (Merriam et al., 2016).

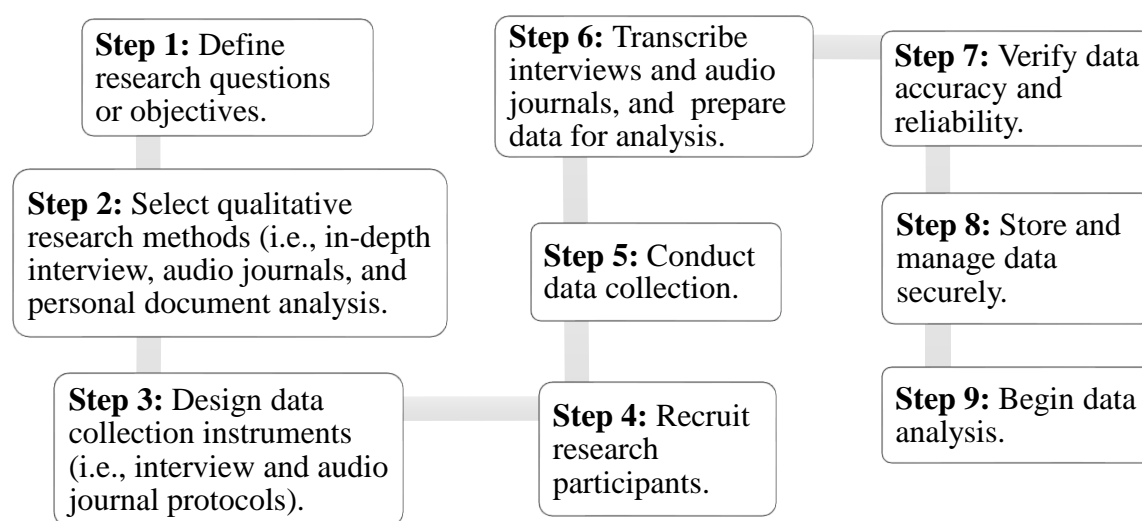


Figure 1: Data Collection Process Flowchart

Furthermore, participants documented instances of experiencing or not experiencing SLWA during dissertation writing in their audio journals. While provided with prompts to record the date, time, physical reactions, emotions, thoughts, and context (including location, current activity, and writing progress), they were encouraged to express themselves freely. The length of each audio journal varied among participants, with none exceeding 14 minutes. To streamline the process, participants recorded their audio files on their smartphones and directly sent them to the researcher via Telegram or WhatsApp. Similarly, recognizing that individuals may act differently from what they claim or believe to be true, personal documents were also collected for analysis (e.g., research proposals, drafts, literature review matrix, completed chapters, and dissertations). Such textual data provide a more compelling case (Mohd Noor, 2008) because they are not influenced by the researcher.

Uniquely, the initial data analysis revealed a recurring pattern of subjective emotional experiences in dissertation writing. However, participants often articulated their feelings in lengthy sentences, occasionally using "I think" to describe emotions and "I feel" to express thoughts. Therefore, to delve deeper into this observation and prevent misinterpretation of the existing data, a complementary survey was employed. Utilizing Scherer's (2005) affect categories and word stems for seven utilitarian emotions (anger, shame, guilt, joy, anxiety, fear, and disgust) along with the dimensional structures of the semantic space for emotion,

participants were asked to select specific words (alongside their definitions) or add their own to depict their emotional experiences. Additionally, they were tasked with clarifying how each emotion either facilitated or hindered their dissertation completion and whether they perceived themselves as having high or low control over these emotions in writing-related situations. Essentially, the supplementary instrument furnishes valuable data to support and validate the findings derived from the primary data sources. It is worth noting, however, that the main data sources for this paper are the in-depth interviews and audio journals.

Data Analysis

This research utilized cyclical data analysis, enabling a comprehensive investigation into the subject under study (Mackey et al., 2016), as depicted in Figure 2 illustrating the data analysis process flowchart. The initial data collection and analysis establishes preliminary propositions to develop the second and more focused round of data collection where the propositions are explored and refined (Mackey et al., 2016). The propositions are formed in three-stage data analysis process using open, axial, and selective coding to identify emerging categories and relationships (Corbin et al., 2015, as cited in Merriam et al., 2016). The data underwent three re-coding cycles with allotted time-gaps to check for consistency (Mackey et al., 2016). Finally, each case descriptions are constructed and patterns in within- and across-case analysis are identified for abstraction (Stake, 1995).

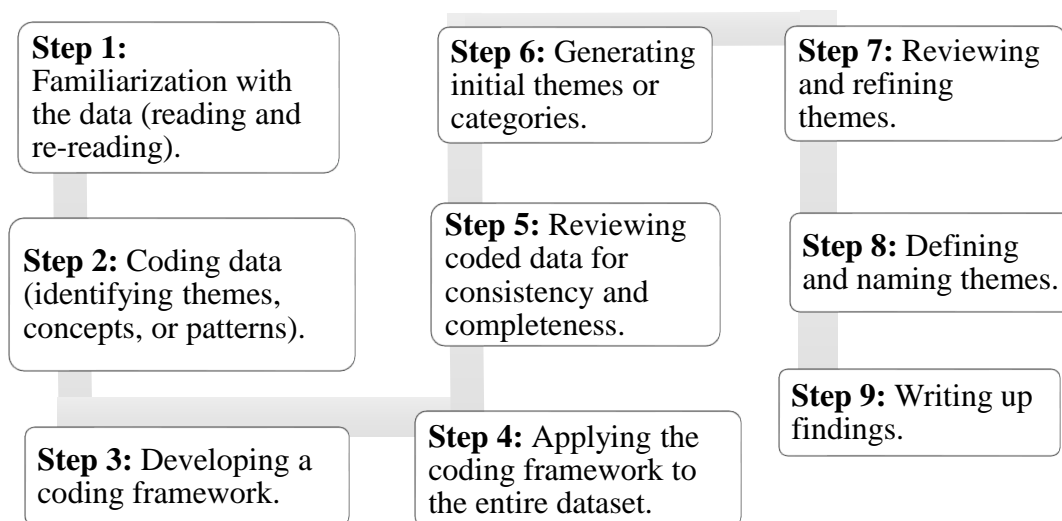


Figure 2: Data Analysis Process Flowchart

Trustworthiness

The study implemented various strategies to bolster the trustworthiness of its findings. These strategies included furnishing rich and detailed descriptions, triangulating data sources, and ensuring thorough engagement in data collection (Merriam et al., 2016). Furthermore, diversity among participants was ensured to achieve maximum variation, and member checks were conducted to gather feedback on the analysis and interpretation of the data (Merriam et al., 2016). Consequently, these measures were employed to enhance the credibility of the study's findings.

Findings

The findings on the influence of SLWA are thematically categorised for each case study (see Table 2 in the following page). Each case theme is explained and discussed using excerpts from the interviews, audio journals and analysed documents.

Table 2: Summary of Themes

No.	Case Study	Themes
1	Nayla	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SLWA influences emotional states. ○ SLWA triggers emotion regulation. ○ SLWA initiates and sustains a debilitating psychological loop that influences dissertation writing progress.
2	Adam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SLWA influences emotional states. ○ SLWA triggers emotion regulation. ○ SLWA initiates and sustains a debilitating psychological loop that influences dissertation writing progress.
3	Sophia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SLWA influences emotional states. ○ SLWA triggers emotion regulation. ○ SLWA initiates and sustains a facilitative psychological loop that influences dissertation writing progress.
4	Arwaa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SLWA influences emotional states. ○ SLWA triggers emotion regulation. ○ SLWA initiates and sustains a facilitative psychological loop that influences dissertation writing progress.

SLWA Influences Emotional States

SLWA seems to affect the participants' overall emotional state during dissertation writing by triggering other emotions. One of the participants, Nayla, expressed also experiencing anger, fear, sadness, shame, and guilt, and becoming “*grumpier*” when disturbed during writing (Interview 4, line 163-164). She explained that the guilt “*was there all the time*” (Interview 7, lines 40-43), as she felt unable “*to go out*” or “*watch a movie*” (Interview 2, lines 310-312) because she believed she did not “*deserve to do it*” until she had completed her study (Interview 7, lines 34-35). Guilt, akin to anxiety and shame, is a negative and self-defeating emotion that fosters feelings of helplessness (Breggin, 2014). Likewise, in anger, she would “*blame others*” for her struggles, despite her realization that “*it’s not their fault*” (Interview 3, line 232). In such situations, anger which serves as a form of defensiveness, maintains the illusion of control over her situations (Breggin, 2014), especially as she grapples with feelings of shame and fear. In summary, SLWA may trigger intense emotional experiences, influencing an individual's emotional state, as it can also evoke other emotions.

Similarly, Sophia perceived fear, and sadness, and mentioned feeling “*a little bit agitated*” when she experienced SLWA: “*There was no relief and I felt the burden.*” (Interview 7, line 95-96). Notably, her fear caused her to feel “*burdensome by the things I have to do*” and prevented her from feeling at ease, even when she was not working on her dissertation (Interview 7, line 98-104). In this case, LeDoux (2015) highlights that anxiety and fear are not entirely independent states because it is impossible to feel fearful without being anxious. Existing studies have reported fear as one of the factors of SLWA such as fear of negative evaluation (Fajri et al., 2018; Rohmah et al., 2021), of negative comments (Jafari, 2019; Solangi et al., 2021) and of making mistakes (Miri et al., 2018). Hence, since SLWA emerges

as individuals anticipate negative outcomes or consequences, they may also experience fear and other emotions which could influence their emotional states.

In essence, dissertation writing entails both cognitive and emotional processes (French, 2018). Participants reported experiencing emotions such as anxiety, anger, shame, guilt, fear, and sadness while writing. These emotions, also known as utilitarian emotions, often elicit high-intensity emergency reactions as they are crucial for survival (Scherer, 2005). Consequently, these emotions could trigger intense emotional experience and, in turn, influence emotional state.

SLWA Triggers Emotion Regulation

In response to these intense emotional experiences, the participants appear to employ several strategies to alleviate their SLWA and restore their emotional states. For example, Nayla and Arwaa utilize affirmations when confronting writing challenges to motivate themselves to continue working on their dissertations. Nayla convinced herself that *“it is part of the learning process”* that will help her *“mature”* (Interview 4, line 432-434) whereas, Arwaa reminded herself that *“As humans, we have those limitations – we don’t know everything.”* (Interview 2, line 219-220). Sometimes, they would question themselves to spur performance and become more proactive.

Why can’t you finish this (dissertation) when other people can finish in just a few semesters but you are taking years to complete?

(Nayla: Interview 4, line 453-454)

Why would I want to waste my time thinking about it (dissertation) or being anxious about it when I can just finish it?

(Sophia: Interview 3, line 261-262)

If we have a dream, no matter where people throw you, you must face it. You asked for it (further study)! So, why are you complaining now?

(Arwaa: Interview 2, line 273-274)

In this view, provoking or questioning oneself appears to trigger a heightened emotional response, granting them a sense of regained control to manage their anxious thoughts, negative feelings, and writing situations. These behaviours are also evident in their audio journals, where they document recovering emotional states. For example, Nayla reported days when she felt *“okay”* (Audio Journal 1). Similarly, Adam, Sophia, and Arwaa described days when they did not experience any physiological reactions from their emotions while writing (Adam’s Audio Journal 1, Sophia’s Audio Journal 2, Arwaa’s Audio Journal 11). The absence of physiological reactions signals effective emotion regulation since strong physiological reactions are associated with strong emotions (Breggin, 2014). Hence, it appears that SLWA triggers emotion regulation to restore individual’s psychological balance.

Correspondingly, evoking writing and personal goals appears effective in reducing Sophia’s and Arwaa’s SLWA and in restoring their emotional states. Sophia had *“always wanted to have a Master’s degree”* and aimed *“to pursue PhD”* (Interview 1, line 240-241). Her determination *“to move on to the next path”* (Interview 2, line 335-336) and to focus on *“what is left to be done”* (Interview 2, line 332) appears to bolster her sense of self and control over her writing situations, mitigating the debilitating effects of SLWA:

Because I really wanted to finish it. I had fear and I was feeling some dread but not too much.

(Sophia: Audio Journal 2, line 13).

Similarly, Arwaa emphasized the importance of completing her study for her career development (Interview 1, line 202-203; Interview 7, line 39-40) as she also aspired to pursue her PhD (Interview 6, line 119-121) to contribute to society as an expert in her field (Interview 2, line 445-446). It appears that connecting present and future goals is crucial, as it encourages proactive behaviours and fosters visions of positive outcomes. For example, Sophia overcame her writer's block for she believed that *"it is stupid to keep having the anxiety when you can just finish it"* (Interview 3, line 263-264). Arwaa, on the other hand, consulted experts *"to get some input in this study"* (Audio Journal 14, line 47-50) for she believed that,

...we cannot just sit and think of this as a problem...It is a challenge that we have to find ways on how to overcome.

(Arwaa: Interview 1, line 17-19).

According to Saito et al. (2018), students who can clearly visualize and internalize their future selves (or ideal L2 self) tend to experience fewer negative emotions (e.g., anxiety) and more positive emotions (e.g., enjoyment). Hence, evoking writing and personal goals seems effective in reducing SLWA and restoring emotional state and thus, may have positive influence on writing progress.

However, certain emotion regulation strategies seem to yield negative consequences over time. For instance, Adam tends to suppress his anxiety thoughts (Adam-I1: 126-127) by ignoring how he feels and avoiding thinking about them as he would feel *"more conscious of the anxiety"* (Adam-I4: 109). In this case, thought suppression may intensify the very emotion needed to be regulated (Lerner et al., 2015). As a result, Nayla, Adam, and Sophia would pause or avoid working on their dissertations for a period (Nayla: Interview 3, line 78-79; Adam: Interview 1, line 278-279; Sophia: Interview 1, line 204-205). They explained that the *"feeling disappears a bit"* (Nayla: Interview 2, line 422-423), helps *"to get into the mood of writing"* (Adam: Interview 1, line 280-281), *"lifts"* writer's block and gives *"a pair of fresh eyes"* (Sophia: Interview 1, line 39-40). Then again, Nayla and Adam seem to develop avoidance behaviours, which are typical among apprehensive students (Zabihi, 2018), and they tend to defend the ill effects of their thoughts and actions. For example, Nayla justified her stagnant writing progress by prioritizing other tasks: *"The more work you have to do, the more experience you have later."* (Interview 5, line 53-54). Similarly, Adam felt *"justified"* for prioritizing his work for it allowed him to *"temporarily forget"* about his dissertation (Interview 2, line 316-317). In this case, Nayla and Adam appears to misattribute their avoidance actions as what prevented the negative outcomes as they practise resignation as a coping strategy (Wahyuni et al., 2019). In effect, their responses become habitual avoidance and is no longer goal-oriented. Taking these factors into account, it seems that strategies like thought suppression and avoiding writing may have adverse effects, thus reducing their effectiveness in regulating emotions. Consequently, they may negatively impact an individual's progress in dissertation writing.

SLWA Initiates and Sustains a Debilitative or Facilitative Psychological Loop that Influences Dissertation Writing Progress

Point often overlooked, the participants' emotions can either hinder or support their goals, and they may have low or high control over these emotions. In other words, some emotions may be more challenging to regulate than others. In this case, Nayla associated only negative emotions with dissertation writing (see Table 3). Although Nayla perceived some as goal-conducive, she had low control on most of them, including emotions she perceived as goal-obstructive such as anxiety, anger, and shame. In fact, she expressed dread or great fear for emotional experience.

Because you know every time you try to do it, the same feelings will appear again, so I am kind of scared of having to experience those kinds of feelings. So, I choose to avoid and stay away from it.

(Nayla: Interview 3, line 200-201)

In such situations, Nayla's emotional experience may inhibit her positive psychological values such as resilience, independence, and self-development (Breggin, 2014) that are vital in restoring her emotional state. Similarly, Adam perceived most of his negative emotions (i.e., anxiety, anger, disgust, and sadness) as goal-obstructive and hard to control (see Table 3). Although Adam perceived some positive emotions as goal-conducive, he found himself having little control over them. Essentially, Nayla's and Adam's subjective emotional experiences in dissertation writing predominantly consist of negative emotions, which are obstructive to their goals and challenging to control. As a result, they may encounter difficulties in reducing their SLWA and restoring their emotional equilibrium.

Table 3: Nayla's and Adam's Subjective Emotional Experience in L2 Dissertation Writing

	Goal-Obstructive Emotions		Goal-Conducive Emotions	
	Low Control	High Control	Low Control	High Control
Nayla	Jittery; Apprehensive; Diffident; Anger; Embarrassed; Humiliating	Worried; Panic	Nervous; Guilt; Gloom; Lonely; Helpless	-
Adam	Nervous; Jittery; Apprehensive; Anger; Anguished; Detest; Disgust; Dejected	Worried; Dislike	Elated; Euphoric; Exhilarated	Ecstatic; Overjoyed; Hopeful

Notably, Nayla and Adam seem to exhibit dysfunctional behaviours due to their unregulated SLWA and other emotions (Barrett, 2017). Despite their awareness of the negative consequences of not making progress, they voluntarily and needlessly postponed their dissertation writing. For example, instead of writing when he had the time, Adam decided to take his family out for a drive because he felt like he "owed them the drive" (Interview 1, line

259). Although Nayla believed that all she needed to do was “*to sit down and focus*” (Interview 2, line 289-291), she procrastinated when she could not visualize a positive outcome for her efforts:

On working days, you’ll hardly have the time to allocate some to writing. Then, you’d say, it’s okay, I’ll do this on the weekends. But on the weekends, something comes up too.
(Nayla: Interview 4, line 41-44)

As a result, the time gaps between their writing activities increase quite drastically. In their audio journals, Nayla mentioned stopping for “*several semesters*” (Audio Journal 1, line 2-3), and Adam confessed feeling “*a little bit of guilt for not contacting her (his supervisor) for months at a time*” (Interview 4, line 204-205). As has been noted, Nayla’s and Adam’s unregulated emotions could initiate and sustain a debilitating psychological loop which could encourage procrastination and thus, impede their writing progress.

In contrast, Arwaa perceived emotions such as joy and calmness in dissertation writing as conducive to her goals and easy to control. Although Sophia did not identify joy, she perceived anxiety as conducive to her goals with a high level of control (see Table 4). It appears that Sophia and Arwaa may encounter fewer difficulties in reducing their SLWA and restoring their emotional states compared to Nayla and Adam, since their emotions are mostly conducive to their goals and easy to control. Sophia insisted that “*the dread*” was “*not to the extent that I didn’t want to do it anymore...*” (Audio Journal 2, line 11-12), so she would “*put a gap, maybe a week or two*” before resuming writing (Interview 1, line 191). Likewise, Arwaa only stopped for one or two weeks when she got stuck in her writing (Interview 3, line 291-300). In this perspective, their SLWA and emotional experiences do not impede their writing progress, as they do not seem to engage in habitual avoidance.

Table 4: Sophia’s and Arwaa’s Subjective Emotional Experience in L2 Dissertation Writing

	Goal-Obstructive Emotions			Goal-Conducive Emotions	
	Low Control		High Control	Low Control	High Control
Sophia	Fear; Terror	Scared;	Dread	Worried; Dejected	Apprehensive; Diffident
Arwaa	-	-	-	-	Joy; Exhilarated; Calm

To explain, their anxious thoughts appear to encourage writing progress. For instance, whenever Sophia was not working on her dissertation, she would be reminded that “*it should be done by now*” or that she “*should be doing it now*” (Interview 7, line 111-112). Similarly, whenever Arwaa was not making progress, she would be reminded of her personal goals: “*Arwaa, you have to find time – it’s something that I have to prioritize.*” (Interview 3, line 312-314). Past studies have reported similar facilitative qualities of SLWA as motivating (Genç et al., 2019) and improving focus (Miri et al., 2018). Nonetheless, it is important to note that Sophia and Arwaa do not seem to suffer a persistent emotional turmoil, despite their SLWA and emotional experience when facing writing challenges. Sophia was very clear that she did not feel guilty (Interview 7, line 108-113) and Arwaa denied feeling stressed (Interview 3, line 288-289). To emphasize, Sophia, who was in her final semester, successfully completed her

dissertation on time for submission, whereas Arwaa, who was in her first semester, submitted 11 audio journals as records for her writing progress. In contrast, Nayla submitted three audio journals, while Adam submitted only one. Hence, effective emotion regulation is essential for restoring emotional states, as SLWA could initiate and sustain a facilitative psychological loop, encouraging writing progress by maintaining focus on writing and personal goals.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is ill-advised for supervisors and language instructors to use anxiety to provoke performance among students, as motivating them with threats of failure is counterproductive (Woodrow, 2006). Such an approach could exacerbate SLWA and amplify other dejection-related emotions (Papi et al., 2019), thereby initiating and sustaining the debilitating psychological loop, which further impedes their writing progress. In this case, students may benefit more when supervisors and language instructors discourage perceptions of writing inability, recognize students' achievements and writing competence, and suggest specific solutions to resolve writing issues.

Moreover, students could also benefit from learning about the cognitive processes that influence their emotions and the affective processes that influence their thoughts. They need to be aware of both intellectual and emotional cues that signal when they are ready to write, resume, prioritize other tasks, or stop altogether. Therefore, they should also be taught how to effectively regulate their emotions, as some strategies (such as avoiding writing and thought suppression) may have negative repercussions over time.

For empirical implications, researchers should consider utilizing multiple data collection methods to gather information on participants' SLWA. Relying solely on self-assessment is ill-advised, as it only reflects participants' tendencies to experience SLWA. Since trait SLWA may not accurately capture the fluctuating state experience of writing anxiety, there is a risk of misinterpreting the data. Previous studies have shown that low or moderate levels of trait SLWA can influence writing performance (Cantina, 2016; Wahyuni et al., 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to address both the trait and state-like qualities of SLWA in the research design to construct a comprehensive understanding of this affective phenomenon.

Conclusion

In conclusion, SLWA may hinder students' dissertation writing progress by initiating and sustaining a debilitating psychological loop when their emotion regulation is less effective in reducing writing anxiety and restoring emotional balance. This debilitating loop focuses their attention on negative emotions, self-related thoughts, and preoccupation, which can lead to procrastination and reduced assertiveness. In contrast, when students effectively regulate their emotions to restore psychological balance, SLWA appears to support their writing progress through a facilitative psychological loop. This loop engages writing and personal goals, stimulating motivation and encouraging proactive behaviours. With the study objectives achieved, it becomes evident that SLWA could be a potential factor contributing to delayed graduation, as it may influence students' dissertation writing progress.

Nevertheless, this study has its limitations. The findings could potentially be more applicable to various contexts if the research had involved a larger number of participants (Merriam et al., 2016). Additionally, including the perspectives of supervisors could have provided a different angle on the participants' experiences with SLWA and their dissertation writing journey, thus

strengthening the findings. As such, future researchers should take these limitations into account when designing their studies and consider exploring topics such as the affective processes in L2 dissertation writing, students' emotion regulation strategies, and self-regulatory skills.

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Declaration Statement

The lead author affirms that this manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study being reported; that no important aspects of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned (and, if relevant, registered) have been explained.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare. All co-authors have seen and agree with the contents of the manuscript and there is no financial interest to report.

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