



# A Study of Non English Majors' English Argumentative Writing Anxiety

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**Abstract.** Using the second language writing anxiety scale, this study investigated the English writing anxiety of 110 non-English majors from two universities in Guangdong Province by means of questionnaires and interviews, and analyzed the anxiety differences from the perspective of gender and major. The results show that non-English majors' English argumentative writing anxiety is at a moderate level, and girls' anxiety is higher than boys' anxiety, while science and Engineering Majors' anxiety is higher than literature and History Majors' anxiety. According to the above data and interviews, this paper also analyzes the causes of anxiety and puts forward the corresponding solutions.

**Keywords:** non English majors · argumentative writing anxiety · gender · major

## 1 Introduction

As an important emotional factor, anxiety will have a great negative impact on our foreign language learning process. The concept of foreign language anxiety was first proposed by Horwitz in 1986. He believes that foreign language anxiety is a complex of self perception, beliefs, feelings and behaviors generated by language learners in the process of foreign language learning, and it is closely related to foreign language classroom learning [1]. Moreover, the foreign language classroom anxiety scale compiled by them has also been widely used in the study of foreign language learning anxiety. With the continuous development of foreign language learning anxiety research, scholars have carried out more detailed classification research on foreign language learning anxiety from the four aspects of listening, speaking, reading and writing. For example, Cheng (2005) [2] and Zhang Huiling (2013) [3], mengxiujuan (2010) [4] and Z Diao&S Paramasivam (2013) [5] have found that English listening and speaking anxiety is widespread among students, And the causes and solutions are analyzed; Shiyunzhang, liuzhenqian (2006) [6] and A Abdulateef & Y Tenku & M Binti & T Mansor & SS Dhari(2016) [7] all analyzed the differences between male and female students' English reading anxiety from the perspective of gender, and reached the opposite conclusion.

Writing has always been a language learning process that English learners are afraid of. Many learners tend to have negative emotions when writing. Therefore, Cheng (2004) [8] designed the second language writing anxiety scale to accurately test people's writing anxiety. In recent years, there have also been some studies on writing anxiety in China.

For example, Liu Jing (2011) [9] studied the differences in writing anxiety between English majors and non-English majors; Liushisheng and Liumeihua (2013) [10] summarized the main causes of College Students' writing anxiety through case study method, and proposed corresponding solutions to these causes. Foreign scholars also have some research on writing anxiety. For example, R Lababidi (2021) [11] investigated the causes and manifestations of Lebanese college students' writing anxiety by issuing questionnaires and conducting focus group interviews, discussed the psychological needs of Lebanese learners, and provided the basis for further research.

Through reading the literature, the author found that the research on writing anxiety in China is usually regional, usually taking college students in each province as the research object, while the research on English writing anxiety of Non-English Majors in Guangdong is less. Therefore, the author will use the second language writing anxiety scale designed by Cheng (2004) [8]. In addition, an interview was conducted to investigate the English writing anxiety of (number) college students in Guangdong.

## 2 Research Methods and Tools

### 2.1 Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the current situation of English Argumentative Writing Anxiety of non-English majors, and put forward corresponding solutions according to the anxiety and its causes. The specific research questions of this study are as follows:

1. what is the current situation of English Argumentative Writing anxiety of non-English majors?
2. what factors lead to English argumentative writing anxiety?
3. what effective strategies can alleviate Non-English Majors' Argumentative Writing Anxiety?

### 2.2 Subjects

The subjects of this study are 110 non English majors from two universities in Guangdong Province, including 42 males and 68 females; There are 52 students majoring in science and engineering and 58 students majoring in literature and history.

### 2.3 Research Tools

#### Second language writing anxiety scale

This study will use the second language writing anxiety scale designed by Cheng in 2004, and make appropriate changes and deletions according to the needs of this study. At the same time, the author will also translate the scale into Chinese, so that non-English majors can better fill in the questionnaire. The scale has 23 questions in total, using the

form of the racter 5 subscale, The items range from “this is completely not my case” (1 point) to “this is completely my case” (5 points), with a total of five options.

### Interviews

In addition to the questionnaire, this study will also interview 20 students randomly selected from the subjects. The questions are as follows:

1. Do you feel anxious when writing English argumentative papers?
2. What do you think are the main reasons for your anxiety?
3. What methods do you think can alleviate the anxiety of English argumentative writing?

## 3 Results and Discussion

### 3.1 General Situation of Argumentative Writing Anxiety of Non English Majors

Firstly, the author made a descriptive statistical analysis of all the questionnaire data. Those whose average value is greater than or equal to 3.5 are high anxiety, those whose average value is between 2.5 and 3.4 are moderate anxiety, and those whose average value is less than 2.4 are low anxiety (Oxford and Burry Stock 1995) [12]. The data in Table 1 and Table 2 show that the average score of anxiety in English argumentative

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of English Argumentative Writing Anxiety Scale for non English Majors

Total number of people	Average value	Standard deviation
110	61.04	13.010

(self-painted)

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of each item of the English Argumentative Writing Anxiety Scale for non English Majors

Title number	Average score	Standard deviation	Title number	Average score	Standard deviation	Title number	Average score	Standard deviation
1	3.2	1.077	8	2.64	1.158	15	3.02	1.128
2	3.27	1.135	9	3.35	1.156	16	3.74	1.068
3	3.15	1.257	10	3.15	1.192	17	2.63	1.220
4	4.19	1.034	11	3.11	1.178	18	3.1	1.228
5	3.7	1.1	12	2.76	1.257	19	3.35	1.102
6	3.38	1.138	13	3.19	1.225	Overall	3.22	0.376
7	3.21	1.096	14	2.95	1.246			

(self-painted)

writing of non English major college students is 61.04, the standard deviation is 13.010, and the average score of all questions in the questionnaire is 3.35. It can be seen that the anxiety level of Non-English Majors' English argumentative writing is at the medium level, and there are great differences in individual anxiety levels.

Table 2 includes the detailed data of each item in the scale, which provides more references for better understanding the English Argumentative Writing Anxiety of non-English majors. Among them, the average scores of question 4 (I often choose to write down my thoughts in English.), question 5 (I usually do my best to avoid writing English argumentation.) and question 16 (I usually seek every possible chance to practice English argumentations outside of class.) are the highest, which also reflect the students' highest anxiety in these aspects. It can be seen from these three questions that most non-English majors will take avoidance behavior when facing English argumentative writing. During the interview, the author also received feedback similar to the above data. Several respondents said that they believed that writing was the weakest link in English learning, because they were usually not good at how to organize language in English, how to use grammar correctly, etc. In their view, English argumentative writing was difficult and troublesome, therefore, they will avoid English argumentative writing as much as possible. From this we can also see that our English level may have a certain impact on English argumentative writing anxiety.

### 3.2 Gender Differences in English Argumentative Writing Anxiety of Non English Majors

After an overall analysis of Non-English Majors' English argumentative writing anxiety, the author also analyzes the differences in English argumentative writing anxiety from the perspective of gender. From the data in Table 3, it can be seen that females' overall anxiety of English argumentative writing is higher than males'.

In order to more intuitively understand the differences between male and female students' English argumentative writing anxiety, the author made descriptive statistics on each question in the questionnaire. As can be seen from Table 4, the anxiety level of male and female students on the five questions is significantly different. From question 2 (I feel my heart pounding when I write English argumentations under time constraint.), question 3 (While writing English argumentations, I feel worried and uneasy if I know they will be evaluated.), question 10 (My thoughts become jumbled when I write English argumentations under time constraint.) and question 11 (I often feel panic when I write English argumentations under time constraint.), it can be seen that compared with male

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics of gender differences in English Argumentative Writing Anxiety Scale for non English Majors

Gender	Number of people	Average value	Standard deviation
male	42	59.05	13.685
female	68	62.26	12.418

(self-painted)

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics of each item of gender differences in English Argumentative Writing Anxiety Scale for non English Majors

Gender	Title number	Average score	Standard deviation	Title number	Average score	Standard deviation	Title number	Average score	Standard deviation
male	1	3.21	0.971	8	2.57	1.218	15	2.69	1.165
	2	2.95	1.154	9	3.19	1.277	16	3.88	1.005
	3	2.90	1.211	10	2.81	1.045	17	2.60	1.274
	4	4.05	1.045	11	2.88	1.127	18	3	1.254
	5	3.67	1.127	12	2.69	1.257	19	3.21	1.245
	6	3.45	1.257	13	3	1.309			
	7	3.26	1.092	14	3	1.345			
female	1	3.18	1.137	8	2.68	1.117	15	3.25	1.048
	2	3.47	1.077	9	3.44	1.062	16	3.65	1.095
	3	3.29	1.261	10	3.37	1.042	17	2.65	1.185
	4	4.21	1.023	11	3.25	1.129	18	3.16	1.208
	5	3.72	1.083	12	2.81	1.252	19	3.37	0.999
	6	3.37	1.056	13	3.31	1.154			
	7	3.18	1.097	14	2.93	1.180			

(self-painted)

students, female students are more likely to be influenced by external time constraints and results, and they are more likely to be anxious. The difference in question 15 (I don't worry at all about what other people would think of my English argumentation.) shows that compared with male students, female students are less confident when facing others' evaluation of their English argumentation. When interviewing subjects of different genders, the author also found that male students usually said that they were not particularly interested in English, so they thought it would be enough if they completed the writing task, but they paid little attention to the results. The author got the opposite feedback in the interview with female students. They said that although they were not English majors, they thought their English level was ok, so they had high expectations for their English argumentative writing. Therefore, they always wanted to do their best when completing the task of English argumentative writing, and because of this tension and anxiety, they will not be confident in their foreign language writing, afraid of making mistakes, afraid of negative evaluation, causing hesitation, which is easy to form a writing block, hindering the fluency of thought expression, thus affecting their writing of longer texts (Zheng Dingming 2005) [13]. Moreover, if they get an unsatisfactory score, they will be more disappointed.

### 3.3 Major Differences in English Argumentative Writing Anxiety of non English Majors

In order to further study the English Argumentative Writing Anxiety of non-English majors, the author also analyzes the differences of English argumentative writing anxiety

from a professional perspective. From the data in Table 5, we can see that there is little difference in writing anxiety between students majoring in literature and history and students majoring in science and engineering. In contrast, students majoring in science and engineering have higher writing anxiety.

From the detailed data of each question in Table 6, we can find that the anxiety level of questions 7 and 18 is relatively significant. The difference in question 7 (I don't worry that my English argumentations are a lot worse than others'.) shows that students majoring in literature and history are more confident in their English argumentation than students majoring in science and engineering. It can be seen from the difference in question 18 (I am afraid of my English argumentation being chosen as a sample for discussion in class.) that although the students of literature and history are more confident in their English argumentative writing, they are still reluctant to use their English argumentative paper as a model text for class discussion or evaluation. Through

**Table 5.** Descriptive statistics of major differences in English Argumentative Writing Anxiety Scale for non English Majors

Major	Number of people	Average value	Standard deviation
Literature and history	58	60.83	11.698
Science and Engineering	52	61.3	14.330

(self-painted)

**Table 6.** Descriptive statistics of each item of major differences in English Argumentative Writing Anxiety for non English Majors

Major	Title number	Average score	Standard deviation	Title number	Average score	Standard deviation	Title number	Average score	Standard deviation
Literature and history	1	3.12	1.161	8	2.59	1.145	15	3.14	0.990
	2	3.33	1.073	9	3.31	1.102	16	3.66	1.043
	3	3.14	1.196	10	3.22	1.067	17	2.55	1.234
	4	4.09	1.071	11	3.16	1.142	18	3.28	1.157
	5	3.78	1.018	12	2.71	1.204	19	3.24	1.072
	6	3.38	0.962	13	3.19	1.166			
	7	3.05	1.024	14	2.91	1.103			
Science and Engineering	1	3.29	0.967	8	2.69	1.169	15	2.92	1.253
	2	3.21	1.198	9	3.38	1.211	16	3.83	1.087
	3	3.15	1.321	10	3.08	1.313	17	2.71	1.198
	4	4.21	0.987	11	3.06	1.216	18	2.9	1.275
	5	3.62	1.179	12	2.83	1.312	19	3.38	1.129
	6	3.42	1.306	13	3.19	1.287			
	7	3.38	1.146	14	3	1.387			

(self-painted)

interviews, some students majoring in literature and history suggested that although they thought their writing foundation is OK, they were afraid of getting too much negative feedback from teachers or classmates, because it would make them fall into self doubt and anxiety. For example, excessive evaluation from teachers and too many wrong marks will dampen students' enthusiasm for writing and cause serious psychological pressure (Fan Jinling, Zhu Yanan, Wu Bin, 2012) [14]. Therefore, we can come to a conclusion that in their cognition, negative comments from others are also a source of argumentative writing anxiety.

### **3.4 Causes of English Argumentative Writing Anxiety**

#### **Limited English level**

Writing is usually more demanding for language learners than listening, speaking and reading. It requires language learners to have a solid knowledge of grammar and a sufficient vocabulary reserve. In addition, it also needs the ability to organize language in English. In general, it requires a higher comprehensive ability for language learners. For some non-English majors, it is often difficult for them to skillfully use correct grammar and appropriate words to organize sentences, and anxiety will naturally arise with difficulties.

#### **Writing time and writing strategies**

“No matter in which process of writing, you can use certain strategies to help yourself complete the task quickly and with high quality” (Wang Na 2022) [15]. Through the questionnaire survey, the author found that most students are not good at English writing in limited time. During the interview, some subjects said that they often don't have enough time to write English argumentation, because they usually spend a lot of time to conceive the structure and organizational language of the argumentations. Therefore, when writing, they will be more flustered.

#### **Negative comments from others**

The author found that most of the subjects were afraid of receiving comments from others on their English argumentations. They said that if they received negative comments from teachers or classmates, they would lose confidence, and make them more anxious and dare not write English argumentation.

### 3.5 Measures to Alleviate the Anxiety of English Argumentative Writing

#### **Actively improve their English level and increase the number of English argumentative writing exercises**

Non English majors can accumulate words and learn relevant knowledge of English grammar in extracurricular time, so as to consolidate their English foundation. At the same time, they can also read more original English novels and cultivate English writing thinking. In addition, they should also take the initiative to contact English argumentation, and let students or teachers give suggestions for improvement.

#### **Adjust the expected value according to the actual situation**

Through questionnaires and interviews, the author found that some students usually put a lot of pressure on themselves before writing put great pressure on themselves before writing because of their high expectations of their English argumentation, resulting in anxiety in the writing process and disturbing their writing ideas, Students should adjust their expectations of English argumentative writing according to their actual level.

#### **Encouraging teaching strategies**

The author found that many students attach great importance to the teachers' evaluation of their English argumentative writing, so teachers should be aware of the importance of encouraging students in the process of teaching, and take appropriate feedback strategies (Liang Dan 2009) [16], which means they should not express negative feedback directly, so as not to attack students' writing confidence and enthusiasm, but should improve students' writing enthusiasm by adjusting their teaching strategies.

## 4 Conclusion

Writing anxiety have a great negative impact on English learning, which should be paid attention to. This study analyzes the overall situation of Non-English Majors' English argumentative writing anxiety through a questionnaire survey, and further analyzes the differences between gender and major writing anxiety. The study finds that non-English majors' writing anxiety is at the medium level, and female students' anxiety is higher than male students, The anxiety of students majoring in science and engineering is higher than that of students majoring in literature and history. According to the above phenomenon, this study puts forward the corresponding causes and solutions combined with data information and interview content.

Due to the limitations of the research tools and the number of research samples, the conclusions of this study may not be comprehensive enough. The follow up studies can increase the number of samples and adopt more research methods, so as to more objectively reflect students' writing anxiety.

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