



The Current Situation of College Students' Writing Apprehension

Take College English Test Brand 4 as an Example

Wenxuan Zhang^(✉)

School of Modern Science and Technology, Hebei Agricultural University, Baoding 050000, Hebei, China
yyds81712@163.com

Abstract. This study investigated the level of writing apprehension and its triggering factors during the College English Test Brand 4 (hereinafter referred to as CET-4) for university students through a questionnaire survey of 150 students from Hebei Agricultural University, and compared whether there were differences in the level of writing apprehension and triggering factors between English major students and non-English major students in the exam. The results showed that: 1. Students had low levels of writing apprehension and the main triggers of writing apprehension were: task feature and output method; 2. English majors had lower levels of writing apprehension and lower numbers of triggers of writing apprehension than non-English majors. The study made recommendations based on the findings from the student perspective.

Keywords: English writing anxiety · College English Test Brand 4 · English major college students · non-English major college students

1 Introduction

English has always been the main foreign language which was learned by Chinese students, and these days increasingly so competitive job market that English proficiency has become an important measure of students' ability. Due to the reason, the grade of CET-4 and CET-6 have become more and more important for Chinese university students. Because of the exam pressure, students have developed anxiety about learning English. As a specific form of foreign language anxiety, writing apprehension, proposed by Daly and Miller (1975), refers to the anxious psychology and behavior of foreign language learners in the writing process [12]. Both national and international researchers consistently shown that writing apprehension is negatively related to writing performance. Some researchers have conducted an empirical study on the writing apprehension of non-English majors showed that foreign language writing apprehension is a kind of hindering anxiety, which to a certain extent hinders the improvement of students' writing quality and writing ability, and the higher the level of anxiety, the worse the quality of composition (Guo Yan, Qin Xiaoqing 2010) [7]. Other researchers have similarly demonstrated that writing apprehension is an influential factor in writing performance by examining

the changes in writing apprehension and writing performance of non-English major students in English language writing teaching contexts and their quasi-causal relationship. Most of the studies used writing apprehension of non-English majors as a sample or did not make a requirement whether the subjects were English majors or not. Therefore, we wanted to investigate whether English majors and non-English majors have the same problems and whether the current situation is similar in terms of English writing anxiety. Since universities in some parts of China do not make it a mandatory requirement for English majors to take the English IV exam for college students, all English majors in our school who met the requirements for taking the exam registered for the CET-4 for college students. In terms of coping with writing anxiety, Guo Yan and Qin (2010) suggested that university English teachers should strengthen their mediating role in students' learning process from the perspective of paying attention to students' emotional factors [7]. Zhao Mi (2021) suggested that teachers should choose appropriate teaching materials for teaching and form summative assessments of students from the perspectives of university English teachers' textbook selection and assessment of students [5]. Based on the requirements of university English teaching reform and the current status of the reform, Wang Shouren and Wang Haixiao (2011) proposed the correct integration of teachers and computer networks, the integration of network technology with foreign language courses, and the establishment of a suitable network ecology for foreign language teaching [8]. Most of the coping strategies are from the perspective of university English teachers, and relatively few are proposed from the students' perspective.

In view of this, this study attempts to make a comparative analysis of university students' confidence in their own writing ability in the face of writing essays in the university's Level 4 exam and the writing anxiety of English majors and non-English majors in this exam. Based on the results of the study, we propose solutions from the students' perspective. The aim of this study is to analyse the current situation of writing apprehension among university students in our school when they face the CET-4, and to provide advice to students and teachers in our school or schools of equivalent level, and to help students overcome their writing apprehension in the exam and improve their writing performance in CET-4.

2 Research Design

2.1 Research Subjects

The subjects were 150 students from Hebei Agricultural University, 51 of whom were English majors (40.7%) and 89 were non-English majors (59.3%). All the subjects had passed the CET-4.

2.2 Research Tools

The survey was conducted in the form of a quantitative questionnaire. This questionnaire basically followed the "English Writing apprehension Triggering Factor Scale" by Bai Liru (2017) [1]. However, considering the fact that students did not understand the specialized words in the section of language ability triggering factors, the questionnaire was

modified to include “vocabulary characteristics”, “vocabulary ability”, “semantic ability”. The four sub-questions “Vocabulary features”, “Vocabulary competence”, “Semantic competence” and “Vocabulary breadth” have been changed to “I can use the vocabulary of CET-4 as specified in the writing of essay questions for the English language examinations for students.” and “I can use the vocabulary of CET-6 accurately in writing essay questions for the CET-4.” The question set in the marking feedback elicitors section of the questionnaire” was changed to “I am afraid of knowing my grade of CET-4.”; and in view of the fact that the six marking responses described in the scale were largely unavailable to the participants after the examination. The question was changed to “I am afraid of knowing my grade of CET-4”. Four additional questions were added to the questionnaire to collect basic information about the students, including their gender, grade, major and whether they had passed the English language examinations. The questionnaire was revised to include 31 questions, with five options ranging from “very much in my situation” (1 mark) to “not at all in my situation” (5 marks) for questions 5 to 21; 22 to 31 were reverse questions, so the options were the options have been adjusted accordingly, from “does not fit my situation at all” (1 mark) to “fits my situation very well” (5 marks).

The survey was conducted using Questionnaire Star to publish the questionnaire, and the statistical results were collated and averaged and summed using Excel software.

2.3 Research Questions

- 1) The current situation of university students' apprehension levels during the writing process of the CET-4 and their main apprehension triggering factors.
- 2) Whether there is any difference in the level of apprehension and its triggering factors between English majors and non-English majors in the writing process of the CET-4.
- 3) Based on the results of the data analysis, the students' perspectives are used to propose targeted solutions.

3 Result and Analysis

3.1 The Current Situation of English Writing Apprehension Level and the Triggering Factors Among University Students in Our School

In the analysis of the data, the assessment of the presence of apprehension was based on the “Investigation and Analysis of Triggers of Anxiety in Foreign Language Writing among First-Year English Majors” (Wang Heyu, Li Huiyan 2020) [6]. The study used a score above the median of three as the criterion for the presence of apprehension, i.e. a score of three or more was considered to be the presence of apprehension; a score of three or less was considered to be the absence of apprehension and the level of apprehension was judged according to the number of apprehension trigger types. As shown in Fig. 1, the average number of apprehension types was 2.21, which means that students in our school had writing apprehension during the writing process of the CET-4, but it was at a low level. The mean values of the two apprehension triggering factors, task feature and output method, were 3.03 and 3.01 respectively, thus indicating that these two factors induce writing apprehension in students during the CET-4; however, they were all below 3.5, indicating that these two factors induce a moderate level of apprehension.

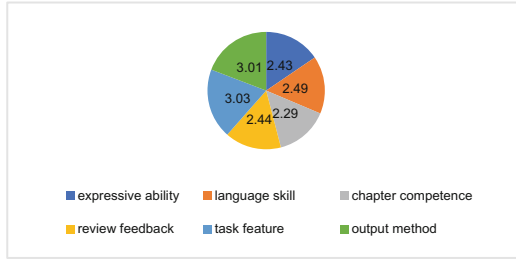


Fig. 1. The average number of each writing apprehension triggering factors.

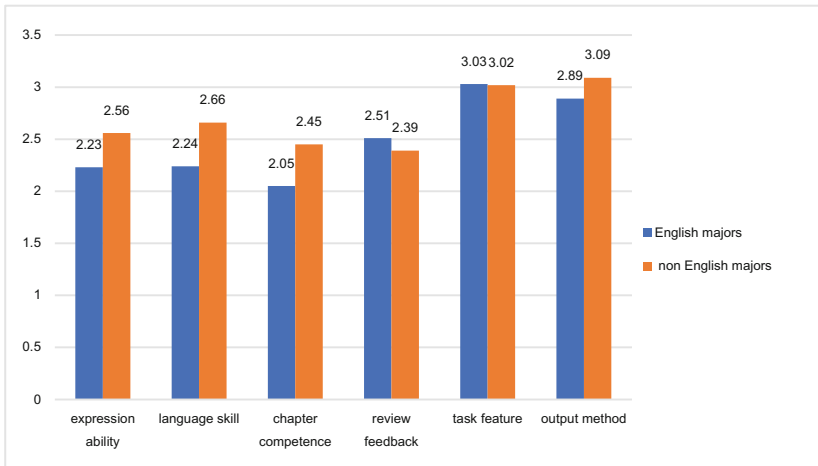


Fig. 2. The average number of English majors and non English majors' writing apprehension triggering factors.

3.2 Comparison of the Level of Apprehension in English Writing Between English Majors and Non-English Majors in Our School

The method of data analysis for this research question was the same as the method used in the previous research question. As shown in Fig. 2, the mean number of apprehensive level for non-English majors was 2.48, meaning that non-English majors at our university had writing apprehension during the writing process of the CET-4, but at a low level of writing apprehension. The mean values of the two apprehension inducing factors, task feature and output method were 3.02 and 3.09 respectively, thus indicating that these two factors induce students' writing apprehension during the CET-4, but they are both below 3.5 points, indicating that these two factors induce moderate levels of apprehension. As shown in Fig. 2, the mean number of apprehension lever for English majors was 1.92, meaning that English majors at our university had writing apprehension during CET-4 writing, again at a low level of writing apprehension. The mean number of task feature as a factor inducing apprehension was 3.03, thus indicating that task feature induces students' writing apprehension during the CET-4, but below 3.5 points, indicating a moderate level

of apprehension induced by this factor. When compared, although both English majors and non-English majors at our school were at low levels of writing apprehension, English majors still had lower levels of writing apprehension than non-English majors and had fewer writing anxiety inducing factors than non-English majors.

4 Discussion and Implication

4.1 Levels of English Writing Apprehension and Triggering Factors Among Students in Our School

In this study, the subjects showed low levels of English writing apprehension overall, which is inconsistent with the findings of Wang Heyu, Li Huiyan (2020) [6], Ma Jie and Dong Pan (2017) [4], and Guo Yan and Qin Xiaoqing (2010) [7], all of which showed that the subjects were generally at a moderate level of writing anxiety. The triggers of writing apprehensive for the subjects in this study were task feature and output method, which is different from Wang and Yu and Li Huiyan's (2020) study [6]. Their study concluded that expressive ability, language skill, chapter competence, task feature and output method were all predisposing factors for students' writing apprehension. Although the findings of this study differ from Wang and Yu and Li Huiyan's (2020) study, they both prove that task feature and output method are predisposing factors for English writing apprehension, so it is necessary for students to practice these two factors in a targeted way if they want to improve their writing performance in the CET-4. Students are advised to study and practice English writing to study the content of different disciplines in order to improve their familiarity with the knowledge related to the topics of essays for the CET-4. Secondly, writing practice on different genres of composition in order to address the apprehension induced by the genre of composition in English writing. The two methods mentioned above are mainly designed to address English writing apprehension induced by task factors. Thirdly, in the process of English writing practice, active restrictions are placed on factors such as time, word count and writing speed, while from meeting the writing requirements of the essay questions of CET-4, in order to achieve a solution to English writing anxiety induced by the output method.

4.2 Comparison of English Writing Apprehension and Triggering Factors Between English Majors and Non-English Majors in Our School

Both English majors and non-English majors in our school had low levels of English writing apprehension, but English majors still had lower level of writing apprehension than non-English majors. In terms of triggers of writing apprehension, English majors had fewer triggers than non-English majors, task feature is triggering factor for both English majors and non-English majors, but output method is a trigger of English writing apprehension for non-English majors. Therefore, if non-English majors want to improve their writing performance in the CET-4, they must set limits on writing time, word count and speed in their English writing practice.

4.3 There Are Shortcomings in This Study

No statistics were kept on the subjects' performance in the composition CET-4, and all could not be guaranteed that all subjects filled in their own true situation. It cannot be ruled out that some students overestimated or underestimated their writing apprehension during the CET-4. Second: The subjects of this study were all selected from students in our school, so the results of the study have limitations. The results of the study are not applicable to other regions of China and universities of different teaching levels.

5 Conclusion

In this study, the current situation of writing apprehension and the triggering factors of writing apprehension of our students in CET-4 were investigated in the form of a questionnaire and based on qualitative analysis, and whether there were differences between the above two aspects and those of English majors and non-English majors. The study found that the overall writing apprehension of our students in this exam was low, and the triggering factors for writing apprehension were task factor and output method, and the level of writing apprehension of English majors was slightly lower than that of non-English majors, and the triggering factors for writing apprehension were less than that of non-English majors. Based on the above findings, the students' perspective was used to address the writing apprehension induced by the task feature and output method factors.

References

1. Bai Liru. "English Writing Anxiety Predisposing Factor Scale Development." *Foreign Language World*.05(2017):74–82.
2. Bai Liru. "A Study on the Predisposing Factors and Performance Characteristics of English Writing Anxiety among College English Learners." *Foreign Languages and Literature*. 37.05(2021):129–138.
3. Li, Hang. "A quasi-causal relationship between college students' English writing anxiety and writing performance: Evidence from a follow-up study." *Foreign Language World*.03(2015):68–75.
4. Ma Jie, and Dong Pan. "A Study on Self-Regulation Strategies of College Students' English Writing Anxiety." *Foreign Language World*.05(2017):83–89.
5. Zhao Qiu. "Exploring Teaching Methods in College English Writing Classes - Taking American College English Writing as an Example." *Overseas English*.04(2021):160–161.
6. Wang Heyu and Li Huiyan. "An investigation and analysis of the causal factors of foreign language writing anxiety among first-year English majors." *Testing and Evaluation (College English Teaching & Research)*.06(2020):21–27. <https://doi.org/10.16830/j.cnki.22-1387/g4.2020.06.004>.
7. Zhao Qiu. "Exploring Teaching Methods in College English Writing Classes - Taking American College English Writing as an Example." *Foreign Language World*.04(2021):160–161.
8. Wang Shouren and Wang Haixiao. "A Survey on the Current Situation of College English Teaching in China's Universities and the Direction of College English Teaching Reform and Development." *Foreign Languages in China*. 8.05 (2011): 4–11+17. <https://doi.org/10.13564/j.cnki.issn.1672-9382.2011.05.011>.

9. Wang Song and Zeng Xiangfa. "A Review of Research Related to College English Writing Anxiety and Its Countermeasure Analysis." *Journal of Higher Education* .02(2021):55–57+62.
10. Cheng, Y. S. "A measure of second language writing anxiety: Scale development and preliminary validation." *Journal of Second Language Writing* 13.4(2004):313–335.
11. Daly, J& D. Wilson. Writing apprehension, self-esteem, and personality [J]. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 1983 (17): 327–341
12. Daly, J.& M. Miler. The empirical development of an instrument of writing apprehension[J]. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 1975(3): 242–249.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

