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Reasons and Measures for English Major's Writing Anxiety in TEM-4

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Abstract: This study conducted semi-structured interviews with four TEM-4 test takers to explore the reasons for Chinese university students' anxiety about writing the TEM-4 test and their responses. The results showed that: firstly, participants generally felt anxious in the TEM-4 test due to the fear of not having enough time to write, and they also believed that this fear would affect the efficiency and quality of their writing. Secondly, participants felt that their anxiety stemmed from a lack of preparation for the test, which caused them to deviate from the topic and to write slowly. Thirdly, fear of the TEM-4 test itself was also a major cause of anxiety. As the TEM-4 test is a difficult test to write and there are few opportunities to take the test, it can cause a lot of psychological pressure on candidates to write. Alleviating the writing anxiety of TEM-4 test takers can be done in two ways: the preparation of the students themselves and the tutoring of the teachers.

Keywords: Writing Anxiety; TEM-4 Test; Reasons; Measures.

1. Introduction

Anxiety is an important emotional factor in the process of learning a foreign language and is one of the main triggers of learning behavior and learning outcomes for foreign language learners. In the case of foreign language writing, it is one of the most time-consuming and slow-acting language skills for foreign language learners because of a lack of socio-cultural awareness, a lack of appropriate ways to achieve language functions or a lack of understanding of the expectations of readers from different cultures. In addition, a large number of foreign language learners become nervous, anxious, or fearful during the writing process, especially during the writing of foreign language tests, due to subjective factors or objective factors in the writing process, which hinders the development and improvement of their foreign language writing skills. Therefore, it is important to understand the causes of anxiety in writing for the TEM-4 test and to provide remedial teaching or training to improve the quality of writing texts, writing ability, and writing level of TEM-4 test takers.

2. Literature Review

Anxiety is one of the most prominent and prevalent emotions, defined as a feeling of uneasy suspense by Rachman [1], and has been the focus of research in foreign language education since the early 1970s. Anxiety is usually associated with the improvement or impairment of a person's performance in a given situation [2].

There has been a large amount of research on language learning anxiety in recent years. Foreign language learning anxiety is widely viewed as domain-specific [3]. It is a type of trait anxiety that recurs in language learning situations [4-7]. Horwitz et al argue that foreign language anxiety is responsible for students' negative emotional reactions to language learning because they have to face a completely unfamiliar language and culture [8]. Thus, language learning anxiety is specific to the context in which language learning is used and is different from general anxiety and other conceptual anxieties (such as general or test anxiety) [9].

Due to the main place for foreign language learning being in the classroom, many studies focus on classroom anxiety. Horwitz et al. identified three components of foreign language classroom anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety [8]. During the exam, candidates experience test anxiety due to fear of negative evaluation, feedback, or criticism and fear of unsatisfactory performance by the examiner.

As a specific form of foreign language test anxiety, writing anxiety mainly refers to the anxiety and behaviors that foreign language learners show during the writing process, such as avoiding writing tasks and worrying about their essays being read and commented on by others. ..... Writing anxiety is not a general psychological tension, but refers to the degree of more intense anxiety or fear" [10]. Most studies have focused on English writing anxiety among high school students as well as college students, but fewer have specifically studied English major students' writing anxiety for the TEM-4 writing test. However, this anxiety can severely affect college students' performance in the TEM-4 writing test. Therefore, it is important to understand the causes of English major students' writing anxiety in TEM-4 test and to understand how to alleviate it.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

A non-probability sampling method Four participants were recruited from a school in Guangzhou for this study. All four were female students studying at a foreign language institute, and the length of TEM-4 preparation ranged from six months to one month.

3.2. Instrumentation

This study designed a semi-structured interview outline as the main research tool through pre-interviews and by referring to relevant overseas research, to maximize the candidates' perspectives, understanding, and experiences [11] and to minimize the variation in questions between the five interviews to increase the possibility of obtaining a diversity

of perspectives on the same topic [12].

3.3. Procedure

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in Chinese and were audio-recorded with the participant's consent for post-analysis to study the data, this study used the 'content analysis technique'[13]. The researcher converted the candidates' recordings into text and added codes, or 'categories', to each recording. Interviews with four individuals ranged from 20-30 minutes in length.

4. Result

Table 1. Focus codes for the first part of the interview

Code	Paradigm
Time	I was afraid that cannot finish writing (the essay).
	The time for composing (essay) also was limited.
	The time limit for writing will lead to mental panic.
	The exam time is very tight.
	I didn't have time to stop.
Performance	(I) almost finished writing at the right time.
	I write very fast.
	The quality of the essay is not very good.
	…will lead to the problem of spelling errors ... and affect the neatness of the paper.
	I feel that the more nervous I am, the slower I write.
	(I) always pay attention to time during the writing process.

When the researcher mentioned whether the question of time during the time of the TEM-4 test made the test takers anxious, the participants agreed that this was the question that made them most anxious. The two codes that were summarized from their responses were time and performance. After counting, the total number of interview transcripts categorized as time was 39. Participants responded strongly to the source of anxiety, limited time, as the most frequently occurring cause of anxiety.

The majority of participants agreed that the TEM-4 test was very tight and did not allow extra time for reflection, which made candidates very nervous during the exam. Firstly, the short time available to candidates to compose essays under time constraints can lead to candidates writing off-topic or poor-quality essays (e.g., essays with confusing logic, inappropriate examples, and confusing handwriting). In the limited time available for writing, students are unable to fully reflect on their grammatical and rhetorical skills, classic sentence patterns, and ideas in their TEM-4 test writing. In addition, due to the time constraint in writing, candidates would pay frequent attention to the time during the examination, which would lead to interruptions in their thinking and less efficient writing. In addition, candidates will frequently make spelling mistakes or grammatical errors when they are under high tension due to lack of time. It may even happen that due to the overwhelming tension, the mind is empty and does not know what to write.

Table 2. Focus codes for the second part of the interview

Code	Paradigm
Preparation	(I) did not accumulate vocabulary in general.
	In the limited time available, there was certainly no way to prepare adequately.
	Then, I felt that I didn't prepare well enough for the writing.
	The test was very sudden, so the preparation time was greatly reduced.
	I feel okay because I read a lot of model articles.
Performance	I couldn't grasp the point that the examiner wanted to see.
	I was not familiar with the topic and the type of questions.
	(Due to I didn't accumulate enough) I didn't have time to do a draft.
	I had to spend time analyzing it again in the examination room.
	I was not familiar with the topic and the type of questions.
	(I) write what comes to mind.

During the interviews, when asked whether they would feel anxious during the exam if they were not prepared enough before the TEM-4 test, three participants felt that this rather made them feel anxious. The two codes that emerged from their responses were preparation and performance.

First, when participants are not well-prepared, they are not familiar with the TEM-4 essay question type, so they need to spend more time analyzing the questions on the test, resulting in less time to actually write. Due to the potential for low scores, test takers who are unfamiliar with the type of questions will be anxious about whether they are potentially causing a deviation from the correct writing topic. Second, when faced with an unfamiliar topic, candidates need to prepare a lot of content on the fly, which can significantly delay the writing process. Four participants provided their writing experiences to illustrate the frustration and fear of encountering unfamiliar topics, e.g., writing whatever comes to mind due to lack of preparation and writing implausible or even uncorroborated arguments to support fabricated ideas. In such cases, candidates tend to produce text that is redundant in order to meet the word count requirement. All of these situations can lead to writing anxiety. Secondly, it can also make candidates more hesitant in writing essays, worrying that they will not be able to capture the scoring points in the essays they write, thus repeatedly thinking and revising, which is the reason why many candidates are late in writing their answers. At the same time, the lack of preparation before the exam will also make the candidates' writing speed slow, no time to make a draft, and the logic of the written essay is more confusing or off-topic.

Table 3. Focus codes for the third part of the interview

Code	Paradigm
TEM-4 test	I think that the TEM-4 test will make me more anxious because, after all, it is a professional level.
	The recognition of English majors is more important to the performance of the TEM-4 test.
	The TEM-4 test essay has more word requirements.
	TEM-4 requirements are also higher.
	I think (the TEM-4 test) is crucial for English major students.
	Because the TEM-4 test is a more important test for us.
	The difficulty of the TEM-4 test is also a little higher than the CET-4 test or CET-6 test.

Participants generally identified the TEM-4 test itself as a major source of anxiety. The main reasons for participants' anxiety were the importance of the TEM-4 test itself and the difficulty of the exam.

Almost all of the participants thought that the TEM-4 writing was difficult before the test, which caused them to have a heavy psychological burden before the test, which led to psychological anxiety when writing in the test. Secondly, the fact that the award of a bachelor's degree is related to the TEM-4 test objectively leads to a multiplication of pressure on the candidates of the English majors, which makes the students' emotions locked in the huge source of the pressure of "gaining or losing a degree". The writing of the TEM-4 tests, as a factor that severely limits and affects the overall performance of the TEM-4 test, can be particularly anxiety-provoking for students. In addition, the TEM-4 is a high-stakes test that is only given twice as an important standard for English majors, which can increase students' psychological stress during the test and lead to anxiety, which in turn can affect their writing performance and hence their grades.

5. Conclusion

This study can make the following suggestions to alleviate students' writing anxiety in the TEM-4 test: from the students' side, students should prepare well before the test and do more practice and accumulation before the test. Try to read as many writing models as possible within the limited time to improve the writing logic. In addition, candidates can accumulate some writing materials to provide sufficient arguments for the TEM-4 test writing and improve the quality of their essays. From the teacher's side, firstly, teachers need to actively organize psychological counseling for students to ease their mental and emotional state and relieve their anxiety. Secondly, teachers must deeply understand of the TEM-4 test writing standards and present them to students so that they are fully aware of the scoring points and fully prepared for the test. Thirdly, in the preparation for the TEM-4 test, teachers also need to guide candidates on how to rationalize their writing time and how to adjust their mindset if they are short of time, to minimize writing errors caused by anxiety.

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