A study on ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors
- Causes, effects and coping strategies for ESL writing anxiety

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Abstract with keywords

The aim of this study was to measure the level of ESL writing anxiety experienced by Chinese English majors. The effects of ESL writing anxiety on English writing performance, the students’ perception of the main causes of ESL writing anxiety and their learning style preferences in ESL writing class were also examined, which provided pedagogical implications of successful learning and teaching strategies for reducing ESL writing anxiety. This study was based on quantitative research and three questionnaires were used to collect data. The results of the SLWAI showed that there is a high level of ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors, and the Cognitive Anxiety is the most common type of ESL writing anxiety. The differences in the level of English writing anxiety between the groups of freshmen and sophomores reached the level of statistical significance. The sophomores were found to suffer significantly higher levels of English writing anxiety than the freshmen. Correlation analysis results suggested a negative relationship between measure of ESL writing anxiety and measures of writing performance (course grade and timed writing grade). An in-depth analysis of the causes of ESL writing anxiety revealed that linguistic difficulties, insufficient writing practice, fear of tests (TEM), lack of topical knowledge and low self-confidence in writing performance constitute the main sources of ESL writing anxiety experienced by Chinese English majors. Furthermore, suggestions on learning and teaching strategies for reducing ESL writing anxiety were provided on the basis of the acknowledge of sources of ESL writing anxiety and students’ learning style preferences in ESL writing class.

Key words: ESL, ESL Writing anxiety, Causes, Effects, Strategies
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Appendix 1

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Appendix 3
1. Introduction

Second language researchers and theorists have long been aware that anxiety is often associated with second language learning. Teachers and learners generally feel that anxiety is a major obstacle to be overcome in second language learning (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986: 125). Horwitz et al. (1986: 128) defined foreign language anxiety (FLA) as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process”. They proposed three general components of language anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. They also offered an instrument, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure this anxiety. Since then, findings concerning anxiety and language achievement have been relatively uniform, and studies on specific second language anxiety by using the FLCAS and other specific measures began to develop.

In more recent studies, it has been emphasized by some researchers that FLA has specific facets, such as speaking, writing, reading, and listening anxiety. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994: 284) described second language anxiety as “the feeling of tension and apprehension specially associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and writing”. They also examined the instruments that had been used with several scales specifically intended to assess specific second language anxiety and the results that have been reported. Studies using the FLCAS and other specific measures of second language anxiety (SLA) have found a consistent negative correlation between language anxiety and language achievement. Early studies demonstrated a moderate negative effect of anxiety on performance, and more recent investigations have found it to be even more debilitating. There has been a recent trend to identify more specifically the sources of anxiety and the relationship of anxiety to various second language achievements.

Research into writing anxiety is an offshoot of research into oral communication anxiety. In a more comprehensive study, Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallet (1999) found that the anxiety associated with foreign language classroom anxiety and writing
anxiety was clearly distinguishable. Cheng et al. (1999) was the first study to differentiate anxieties related to different second language skills by means of factors analysis. Second language writing anxiety (SLWA) can be defined as “a general avoidance of writing and of situations perceived by the individuals to potentially require some amount of writing accompanied by the potential for evaluation of that writing” (Hassan, 2001: 4). Studies on ESL (English as a second language) writing showed that ESL writing anxiety can have profound effects on ESL writing performance (Hassan, 2001: 18-21; Horwitz, 2001: 115-117; Cheng, 2004: 329-331). Some studies showed that students with high levels of writing anxiety wrote shorter compositions and qualified their writing less than their low anxious counterparts did (Hassan, 2001: 20-21). Cheng analyzed factors associated with second language writing anxiety (Cheng, 2002), and he also offered a measure, the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), to assess the levels and types of second language writing anxiety (Cheng, 2004).

Though SLWA has been increasingly recognized by more and more researchers and educators, few studies have paid attention to the situation of SLWA among Chinese English majors. In this study, the SLWAI was adopted to assess the level and types of ESL writing anxiety experienced by Chinese English majors, and a correlation analysis between writing anxiety and writing performance was used to investigate the effects of ESL writing anxiety. Since both Horwitz’s three components of FLCA and Cheng’s factors analysis were too general to explain the reasons why the Chinese ESL learners feel anxious about English writing, the researcher explored the specific causes of ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors. Furthermore, learning and teaching strategies were provided to facilitate ES writing performance and to reduce ESL writing anxiety.

1.1 Aim

The purpose of this study is to find out if there is ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors. If there is, what are the main factors that cause their ESL writing
anxiety? Does anxiety have a positive or negative effect on their ESL writing performance? If it does have a negative effect on their English writing performance, what strategies can be used to successfully reduce English writing anxiety? In addition, there were some comparison between English majors of grade one and grade two as regards some of the research questions, in order to find out if there are some differences in ESL writing anxiety between the groups of different academic experiences.

The present study aims to answer the following research questions about ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors:

1. Is there any second language writing anxiety among Chinese English majors?
2. If there is second language writing anxiety among Chinese English majors, does it have a positive or negative effect on their English writing performance?
3. What are the main factors that cause ESL writing anxiety in Chinese ESL learners?
4. What learning and teaching strategies can be used to successfully deal with ESL writing anxiety?

1.2 Material and Methods

The primary materials used in this study included three ESL writing anxiety questionnaires and a 30-minute English writing task. Questionnaire I was designed on the basis of the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAL) (Cheng, 2004) to assess the level of ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors. Questionnaire II was designed to find out the most common factors that cause ESL writing anxiety among Chinese students in English writing practice. Questionnaire III adopted Reid’s perceptual learning style preference questionnaire to find out the major learning style preferences of Chinese students in English writing class. For each of the questionnaires, the participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement on a 5-point Likert response scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Scores of the timed English composition and course grades were both used as indices of the participants’ writing performance.
in the study of correlations between English writing anxiety and writing performance.

1.2.1 Participants
Two groups of ESL students majoring in English of a Chinese university participated in this study. One group consisted of 49 freshmen who had attended English writing course for almost one academic year and the other group consisted of 47 sophomores who had attended English writing course for almost 2 academic years. This university is in the middle level of Chinese universities and colleges, as it ranks 296th among 582 universities and colleges in 2011 Chinese University Rankings released by Chinese University Alumni Association in its evaluation report (2011, Chapter 2: 16-33). Hence, the levels of the participants in this study can represent the general levels of Chinese English majors, and the results of the study can be representative of the present situation of ESL writing anxiety for Chinese English majors. Only the English majors were recruited due to the concern that Non-English majors might not have sufficient English writing experiences to provide sufficient information regarding their writing anxiety experiences. The reason why the researcher chose the students of different grades was to find out whether there are some relationships between academic experiences and ESL writing anxiety.

1.2.2 Instruments
This study used the following data sources:

*Questionnaire I – the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI)*
Questionnaire I consists of 22 items, based on the SLWAI (Cheng, 2004), which was designed to assess if there is ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors and to what level. The original version of the SLWAI, developed by Cheng (2004), is an instrument that measures the degree to which a student feels anxious in L2 writing. The SLWAI was assessed and proved by means of correlation and factor analysis to be valid and reliable (Cheng, 2004), and has been adopted in many studies related to second language writing anxiety. The SLWAI consists of 22 items, scored on a
Five-point Likert response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Five of the items (1,4,17,18,22) are negatively worded and require reverse scoring before being summed up to yield total scores. A higher score obtained thereupon indicates a higher level of ESL writing anxiety. A total score above 65 points indicates a high level of writing anxiety, a total score below 50 points indicates a low level of writing anxiety, and a total score in-between indicates a moderate level of writing anxiety. The 22 items of the SLWAI can be divided into three categories of anxiety, such as Cognitive Anxiety (1,3,7,9,14,17,20,21), Somatic Anxiety (2,6,8,11,13,15,19), and Avoidance Behavior(4,5,10,12,16,18,22). The statements of the original 22 items were translated and modified by the researcher in pursuit of naturalness in Chinese interpretation and to suit the ESL learning context in China.

**Questionnaire II – Causes of ESL Writing Anxiety Among Chinese English Majors**

Questionnaire II consists of 8 items (lack of topical knowledge, linguistic difficulties, fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, insufficient writing practice, insufficient writing technique, lack of effective feedback, and fear of tests), made by the researcher by referring to her teaching experiences and secondary materials (see Theoretical Background), which cover possible factors that cause ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors. Questionnaire II was designed to find out the most common problems associated with ESL writing anxiety that Chinese students encounter in ESL writing practice. The results provided a foundation for the suggestions on learning and teaching strategies for coping with ESL writing anxiety.

**Questionnaire III – Perpetual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire**

Questionnaire III consists of 30 items, which was designed on the basis of Reid’s Self-perpetual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (1987) and was adopted to identify the ways one learns best. There are six categories of learning style preferences, such as Visual (6,10,12,24,29), Auditory (1,7,9,17,20), Kinesthetic (2,8,15,19,26), Tactile (11, 14, 16, 22, 25), Group (3,4,5,21,23), and Individual (13,18, 27, 28,30). Adding the scores for each category and multiply by 2, results can be
understood as: major learning style preference (scored 38-50); minor learning preference (scored 25-37); Negligible (scored 0-24). The results of Questionnaire III provided pedagogical implications of successful leaning strategies for reducing ESL writing anxiety.

Indices of English Writing Performance

In order to find out if there is a negative correlation between ESL writing anxiety and writing performance, the researcher collected the information about the participants’ English writing performance provided by the teacher. The participants’ grades on a 30-minute English composition and English writing course grades were both used as indices of their writing performance. The participants were asked to write an English composition within 30 minutes in class, which was administrated and evaluated by their teacher who has eight-year experience as an ESL writing rater for a national-wide college English test in China. Each composition was graded on a 15-point scale with the same grading rubric used for TEM (Test for English Majors in China) which includes five aspects, such as content, organization, language treatment, vocabulary and grammar.

1.2.3 Procedures

The participants were asked to write an English composition under time constraint (30 minutes) at the beginning of an English writing class. Then the participants were administrated to answer Questionnaire I, Questionnaire II and Questionnaire III successively at the end of the class, which took most of the students about 15 minutes to complete. Questionnaire I was distributed first and it took the students about 5 minutes to complete. Then the students answered Questionnaire II, which took them about 5 minutes. Finally, the students finished Questionnaire III in about 5 minutes.

1.2.4 Data analysis

The answers to Questionnaire I—the SLWAI were analyzed with SPSS (Statistical Program for Social Science) to obtain the levels and types of ESL writing anxiety
experienced by the students, and to measure if there is a significant difference in the levels of anxiety between the freshmen and the sophomores. Correlations between ESL writing anxiety and writing performance were assessed by means of correlation analysis on the basis of SPSS. Then the researcher conducted a “key word analysis”, as discussed by Nunan (1992: 146), in which categories emerged from the statements of Questionnaire II, and ranked the causes of anxiety from 1 to 8 according to the number of the students who chose them. Finally, the researcher classified ESL learning style preferences in English writing course into three categories by rating the scores for each category, such as major learning style preferences, minor learning style preference and negligible learning style preference.

2. Theoretical Background
This section reviews the studies on second language anxiety, especially on second language writing anxiety, concerning whether SLA (SLWA) is a state anxiety or specific-situation anxiety, whether it is harmful or helpful to language performance, which factors associated with language anxiety, and how to deal with language anxiety in the language classroom. The main focus is to illustrate SLWA concerning its definition and types, causes, effects as well as learning and teaching strategies for coping with it.

2.1 Definition and types of second language writing anxiety (SLWA)
SLWA is a specific facet of SLA and has been studied as a distinct form of SLA in recent decade with the development of theories and research findings in SLA.

2.1.1 Definition and types of FLA/ SLA
Anxiety, as “a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system”( Horwitz et al., 1986: 125), was perceived intuitively by many second language learners to have a negative influence in L2 learning and was one of the most highly examined variables in psychology and education (Horwitz, 2001). Psychologists make a distinction
between three categories of anxiety: trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety (Horwitz, 2001: 113). Trait anxiety is considered as a stable personality characteristic, and state anxiety is seen as a response to a particular anxiety-provoking stimulus, such as important tests (Spielberger, 1983:1; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991: 90; Horwitz, 2001: 113). The third category, situation-specific anxiety is more recently used to emphasize the persistent and multi-faceted nature of some anxieties (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991: 90-92; Horwitz, 2001: 113). Horwitz et al. (1986) first argued that language anxiety is a situation-specific anxiety, that is, it will be aroused by a specific situation, for instance, a public speech. They also offered the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) which was considered to be the most prominent measure of anxiety concerned specifically with second language learning.

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) or Second Language Anxiety (SLA) is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. Considering language anxiety with relation to performance evaluation within academic and social contexts, Horwitz et al. (1986: 127) drew parallels between language anxiety and three related performance anxieties: communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation. Horwitz et al. (1986: 128) defined communication apprehension as “a type of shyness characterized by fear or anxiety about communicating with people”. Communication apprehension obviously plays a large role in FLA/SLA. People who are apprehensive speaking in dyads or groups are likely to be in even more trouble when doing so in a second/foreign language class, where “in addition to feeling less in control of the communicative situation, they also may feel that their attempts at oral work are constantly being monitored” (Horwitz, et al., 1986: 127). Test anxiety, as explained by Horwitz et al. (1986), refers to “a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure”. Test anxiety is quite pervasive in language classrooms because of its continuous performance evaluative nature. Fear of negative evaluation is an extension of the second component (test anxiety) of FLA/SLA, because it is not limited to test-taking situations; rather, it may occur in any social, evaluative situation, such as interviewing for a job or speaking in second/foreign language class (Horwitz et al.,
1986: 127). It is also broader in the sense that it pertains not only to the teacher’s evaluation of the students but also to the perceived reaction of other students.

2.1.2 Definition and types of SLWA

Studies on writing anxiety are an offshoot of studies on oral communication anxiety. Previous research into writing anxiety wanted to find out whether there is a link between the oral and the writing anxiety. Some argued that people with high oral communication anxiety tended to compensate by writing, and others claimed the links between the oral and the writing anxiety did not exist (Hassan, 2001). Cheng et al. (1999) attempted to differentiate the components of general oral language anxiety and second language writing anxiety. They found that second language writing anxiety is distinguishable from oral communication anxiety; at the same time, they found underlying similarities between the two specific facets of language anxieties.

Writing anxiety, as a subject and situation specific anxiety, was defined as a general avoidance of writing behavior and of situations thought to potentially require some amount of writing accompanied by the potential for evaluation of that writing (Hassan, 2001: 4). Cheng (2004) offered a multidimensional L2 writing scale—the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) which conforms to a three-dimensional conceptualization of anxiety, such as Somatic Anxiety, Cognitive Anxiety, and Avoidance Behavior. Somatic Anxiety refers to one’s perception of the physiological effects of the anxiety experience, as reflected in increase in state of unpleasant feelings, such as nervousness and tension (Cheng, 2004: 316). Cognitive Anxiety refers to the cognitive aspect of anxiety experience, including negative expectations, preoccupation with performance and concern about others’ perception (Cheng, 2004: 316). Avoidance Behavior refers to the behavioral aspect of the anxiety experience, avoidance of writing (Cheng, 2004: 316). Cheng (2004: 331) also pointed out that the negative relationship between test anxiety and L2 writing performance is primarily due to the cognitive components rather than somatic components or avoidance behavior.
2.2 Effects of second language writing anxiety on writing performance
Though a few studies suggested that language anxiety was helpful or “facilitating” in some ways, such as keeping the learner alert (Scovel, 1978; Oxford, 1999:61). Most language research showed a negative relationship between language anxiety and performance (Cheng, 2004; Hassan, 2001; Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). The negative effect of language anxiety was sometime called “deliberating” (Oxford, 1999:60). The relationship between language anxiety and performance is not simple, but subtle.

2.2.1 Effects of FLA/SLA on language performance
In the past few years, research has shown that language anxiety is the specific type of anxiety that is mostly associated with second language performance (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Two of the most common indices of language achievement used in the studies are course grades and standardized proficiency tests. Research consistently shows that language anxiety has a significant and negative effect on performance in these indices of language achievement (Cheng, 2004; Hassan, 2001; Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). In the first study using Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz et al., 1986), there was a significant moderate negative correlation between foreign language anxiety and the grades students expected in their first semester language class as well as their actual final grades, which indicates that students with higher level of foreign language anxiety both expected and received higher grades than their less anxious counterparts. Several studies have also noted a negative relationship between language anxiety and outcome measures other than final grades. Using measures of both classroom anxiety and language use anxiety, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) found significant negative correlations between language anxiety and performance with several language production measures including a cloze test, a composition task, and an objective French proficiency measure. Horwitz (2001) reviewed a large body of research and concluded that anxiety is a very important factor of poor language learning.
Since Horowitz et al. (1986) acknowledged the negative correlations between language anxiety and performance on broad-based measures such as course grades, they suggested that researchers should study its more subtle effects, that is, the relation between language anxiety and the more specific process involved in language acquisition and communication. Some empirical studies have examined the more specific, subtle effects of language anxiety, and a great number of studies show that anxiety causes cognitive interference in performing specific tasks. For instance, MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) found that high anxious students learned a list of vocabulary at a slower rate than low anxious students. Tobias (1979) offered a model which describes the effects of anxiety on learning as seen in three-stages: Input, Processing, and Output. Anxiety may arise at the stage of Input when speech in SL/FL is too fast for the listener, or the written text is composed of complicated sentences above the level of the reader. Anxiety at the stage of Processing may negatively affect the cognitive learning process of the previous learning materials. Some studies have found a negative relationship between language anxiety and outcome measures other than final course grades. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994: 287) claimed that Output involves the production of previously learned material. Performance at the Output stage can be measured by test scores, verbal production, and the proficiency of free speech. Cheng (2004) used writing proficiency grades of a timed composition task as measure of writing performance and found a significant negative relationship between anxiety and performance. Some students’ encountering “writing block” on tests is a good example of cognitive interference at the Output stage.

By examining some of the more specific cognitive processes that may be involved in language acquisition in terms of a three-stage model of leaning: Input, Processing, and Output, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) pointed out that the previous performance measures that examined only behavior at the Output stage (speaking or writing) may be neglecting the influence of anxiety at earlier stages as well as ignoring the links among stages. They found out that anxious students have a smaller base of second language knowledge and have more difficulties in demonstrating the knowledge that
they do process (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994: 301).

2.2.2 Effects of SLWA on writing performance

In general, previous studies revealed that second language writing anxiety is a distinct form of language anxiety, for instance, Cheng et al. (1999) found that second language writing anxiety is distinguishable from general foreign language classroom anxiety. However, researchers also found underlying similarities between L2 writing anxiety and other specific second language anxieties, such as avoidance behavior. Two effects of L2 writing anxiety consistently found in previous works concerning second language anxiety were “distress associated with writing and a profound distaste for the process” (Madigan et al., 1996: 295; Cheng, 2002: 648). For instance, research showed that higher anxious writers tend to avoid taking writing courses and prefer academic majors and careers that are perceived as having relatively little to do with writing (Cheng, 2002: 648).

With respect to the relationships between ESL writing anxiety and writing performance, recent studies suggested significant negative correlations between them with several varied measures. Hassan (2001) used both Writing Quality Task and Writing Quantity Task to find out that low anxious students write better quality composition than their high anxious counterparts. At the same time, low anxious students write more than high apprehensive students. Previous work also suggested that the detrimental effect of writing anxiety is most likely to be manifested when the anxious writer composes under time pressure (Kean et al., 1987: 95-102; Cheng, 2002: 648). Cheng (2004) specified the effects of writing anxiety on writing processes and behaviors, such as physiological effects as reflected in unpleasant feelings of tension or nervousness, cognitive interference in writing process, and avoidance of writing. He also used the participants’ performance on a timed English essay writing task as an index of their English writing performance to measure the correlations between the specific writing anxiety and writing performance. The findings showed a significant negative correlation between anxiety and performance.
2.3 Possible causes of SLWA

Writing is an emotional and cognitive activity, that is, we think and feel while we are writing. Second language writing is also considered as a complex system of social, cultural and contextual factors, and of the learner’s individual characteristics, such as institutional requirements, parental or social expectations, teaching and evaluation procedures, motivation, personality, self-confidence, learner’s belief, L2 proficiency, and even gender and years in school (Cheng, 2002). Therefore, the reasons why the second language learners feel anxious when writing might be different and multiple, but some general causes ranging from highly personal (such as self-confidence) to procedural (such as classroom activities and teaching methods) can be found on the basis of the previous studies in the field of L2 writing as well as writing anxiety.

Horwitz et al. (1986) discussed the roles of fear of test and fear of negative evaluation in second language anxiety; his discussion is applicable to the specific situations of second language writing as well. Test anxiety, as explained by Horwitz et al. (1986: 127), refers to “a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure”. Fear of failure in tests is very pervasive in school contexts and constitutes the most important and common cause of second language writing anxiety because writing is a productive activity influenced strongly by time pressure; even the brightest and well–prepared students often make more errors in test-taking situations. Although similar to test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation of writing is broader in scope because it is not limited to test-taking situations; instead, it refers to both the academic and personal evaluations made by students on the basis of their performance and competence in the target language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991: 105) and occurs in any social, evaluative situation, such as receiving teacher’s negative feedback or error correction on the compositions, and being asked to write an article during a job interview.

Hassan (2001) pointed out some possible causes of writing anxiety from a linguistic and cognitive perspective, such as poor skill development, inadequate role models,
lack of understanding of the composing process, and authoritative, teacher-centered, product-based model of teaching. He stressed that self-confidence is extremely important in determining students’ affective response to writing task. Some studies showed that no matter how skilled or capable individuals are in writing, if they believe they will do poorly or if they do not want to take courses that stress writing, then their skills or capabilities matter little (Holladay, 1981; cited by Hassan, 2001: 4). Research also revealed that even students of high L2 writing competence may not necessarily perceive themselves as competent writers and may not free from writing anxiety (Cheng, 2002). Therefore, low self-confidence or lack of confidence in L2 writing and writing achievement was identified as responsible for students’ experience of L2 writing anxiety.

With respect to affect in second language learning, the learners’ general levels and profiles of language ability can influence their affective responses (Arnold, 1999). Previous works about second language writing pointed out that time, topic and language might be important factors of poor ESL writing as well as writing anxiety. (Hyland, 2003; Leki & Carson, 1997). ESL writers often carry the burden of learning to write in English; particularly they themselves identify language difficulties, such as an inadequate grasp of vocabulary and grammar, as their main problems with English writing and as the main sources of frustration when being unable to express their ideas in appropriate and correct English (Hyland, 2003: 34). The level and specificity of topical knowledge (sometimes referred to as knowledge schemata or real-world knowledge, can be loosely thought of as knowledge structures in long-term memory) presupposed or required of the language learners, can also have an influence in their affective responses to the writing tasks (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). The writers who have the relevant and sufficient topical knowledge may generally be expected to have positive affective responses to the writing tasks, while those who do not may feel much nervous and anxious. In addition, the types of feedback the writers receive on their writing performance are likely to affect their emotions directly (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Cheng, 2001; Hyland, 2003). For instance, a relevant, complete, and
effective feedback with positive comments can produce a good backwash in L2 writing performance and reduce the feelings of anxiety as well.

2.4 Learning and teaching strategies for coping with SLWA

Strategies for coping with second language writing anxiety can be explored from the scope of learners as well as the scope of teachers.

Learning strategies

Oxford (2001:166-172) discussed types of language learning strategies. Three learning strategies, such as meta-cognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and affective strategies may be useful to reduce L2 writing anxiety. Meta-cognitive strategies include identifying one’s own interests, needs and learning style preferences, which help the learner to have a self-knowledge about his learning style as well as its advantages and disadvantages, so as to choose strategies that comfortably fit with his learning style (Oxford, 2001: 167). Reid’s (1987) self-report survey of the perceptual learning style preferences of ESL students provided a good example of learning style preferences, which include visual vs. auditory vs. kinesthetic vs. tactile vs. group vs. individual (Reid, 1987; Hyland, 2003: 53). Reid (1987) made a brief explanation to four basic perceptual learning style preferences: visual learning is focused on reading and studying charts; auditory learning prefers listening to lectures and audiotapes; kinesthetic learning is experiential learning that involves physical activities in learning situations; tactile learning is “hands-on” learning, such as building models and doing experiments (Reid, 1987:89). Appendix 3 (Questionnaire III) in this study was designed on the base of Reid’s perceptual learning style preference questionnaire in order to find out Chinese ESL learners’ learning style preferences in English writing class. Self-knowledge about one’s learning style preferences will help ESL learners and teachers to use various and suitable learning strategies to accommodate these preferences in ESL writing class. For instance, as Hyland discussed, students with an auditory preference work better on tasks like listening to lectures, conversations, or taped material as sources for writing and tasks that require
interaction with others, such as group or pair work involving information transfer, reasoning and discussion (Hyland, 2003: 44). Visual learners, on the other hand, may respond well to reading source texts, writing class journals, and transferring information from graphic, textual, or video material. Tactile students may work well with the tasks that involve writing reports on testing models. Kinesthetic students like to participate actively in the tasks like role-plays, and projects involving data collection (Hyland, 2003: 45). Knowing about the learning style preferences of students will be of significance to ESL teaching and evaluation. Research showed that college students who were taught in preferred learning styles scored higher in tests, fact knowledge, attitudes and efficiency than those taught in instructional styles different from their preferred styles (Reid, 1987:90).

Cognitive strategies involve interactions with the material to be learned (O’ Malley & Chamot, 1990: 138). According to the studies of O’ Malley and Chamot (1990), cognitive strategies, such as repetition (repeating a chunk of language, such as a word or a phrase, in the course of performing a language task), rehearsal (rehearsing the language needed, with attention to meaning, for a written task), translation (using the first language as a base for understanding and / or producing the second language) and transfer (using previously acquired linguistic knowledge to facilitate a language task) might be useful for reducing ESL writing anxiety caused by linguistic difficulties. Oxford (1990: 70-79) claimed that practice is the first and most important set of cognitive strategies, which include five techniques such as repeating, formally practicing with sounds and writing system, recognizing and using formulas and patterns, recombining, and practicing naturalistically. He also pointed out that imitation of native users of the language is another repeating technique used for L2 writing. Learners can improve their use of structures, vocabulary, idioms, and styles in writing by imitation. Teachers could help students by providing different examples of target language writing for them to imitate. In writing, revising is another use of repeating technique, that is, going through a written draft (usually more than once) in order to correct or amend it (Oxford, 1990: 71). Teachers could help students by

Affective strategies include identifying one’s feelings, anxiety or contentment, and becoming aware of the learning circumstances or tasks that evoke them (Oxford, 2001: 168; Arnold, 1999), which helps learners deal with anxiety successfully. Using a diary to record feelings about language learning was suggested as a very helpful strategy. Chamot, Kupper, and Impink-Hernandez (Chamot, Kupper, & Impink-Hernandez, 1988: 17-19; O’ Malley & Chamot, 1990: 139) also offered some affective strategies, such as questioning for clarification (asking for clarification or verification about the task), cooperation (working together with peers to solve a problem, pool information, check a learning tasks, model a language activity, or get feedback on written performance), self-talk (reducing anxiety by using mental techniques that make one feel competent to do the learning tasks), and self-reinforcement (providing personal motivation by arranging rewards for oneself when a language learning activity has been successfully completed). Oxford (1990: 163-168) also offered some specific affective strategies that can be applied to L2 writing, such as lowering writing anxiety by using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation, encouraging oneself by making positive statements or self-rewarding, and taking one’s emotional temperature by writing a language learning diary, using a checklist of their own emotional state, or discussing one’s feelings with someone else. All these strategies could be used flexibly in coping with ESL writing anxiety.

Teaching strategies
Horwitz claimed that educators, in general, have two options when dealing with anxious students; one is to help them to cope with the existing anxiety-provoking situation, and the other is to make the learning contexts less stressful (Horwitz et al.,
Specific techniques for the teacher to reduce students’ second language anxiety include relaxation exercises, advice on effective language learning strategies, behavioral contracting, and journal keeping (Horwitz et al., 1986). All these techniques suit the theory of Process—oriented Approach in L2 writing, which focuses more on the various classroom activities that are believed to promote the development of skilled language use (Nunan, 1995: 86). For instance, when applying the Process—oriented approach, teachers of writing become much more interested in the processes that writers go through in composing texts rather than the result of the learning process—whether the writer could do as a fluent and competent user of the language. Some studies indicated that even students of high L2 competence may not necessarily perceive themselves as competent language learners and may not be free from anxiety in using that L2 (Cheng, 2002). Accordingly, writing teachers are advised to assess students’ writing confidence according to the standards they use when assessing their students’ writing competence. Cheng suggested that the teacher should pay as much attention to instilling in their students a positive and realistic perception of their writing competence as to the development of their writing skills; they should help students learn to face difficulties, even failures without losing confidence (Cheng, 2002: 652).

Actually, reducing second language writing anxiety by changing the context of learning is the most important and considerably the most challenging task. Teachers might monitor a positive, learner-centered classroom climate in order to identify specific sources of students’ L2 writing anxiety (Aoki, 1999: 149-154; Horwitz et al., 1986: 131; Hassan, 2001), to build confidence in their L2 writing skills because inaccurate self-evaluation of writing competence, rather than lack of writing skill, is identified as responsible for students’ experience of L2 writing anxiety (Cheng, 2002). To minimize L2 writing anxiety in the Learner-centered classroom, certain teaching techniques were recommended, such as write more; talk about past writing experience;
find patterns in students’ writing errors; conference during drafting stages; collaborate with students for evaluation criteria; encourage positive self-talk; vary writing modes; monitor attitudes; etc… (Reeves, 1997: 38-45; Hassan, 2001: 28). Cheng (2002) suggested that it is critical to establish a learning environment where students can write in their flawed L2 without embarrassment, where every student writer’s contribution is adequately valued, where activities and writing tasks lead to feelings of achievement, not failure, and where self-confidence is built up. Teachers may need to offer more encouragement and positive feedback, focus more on contents instead of forms, such as giving fair credit for good ideas even if the writing shows flaws in linguistic forms, mark surface errors such as spelling and punctuation mistakes sparingly in early drafts, and even from time to time allow experimentation without evaluation (Cheng, 2002: 653).

3. Analysis and discussion
In this section, the data collected from three questionnaires were presented and analyzed in two steps. In the first step, the results of three questionnaires were presented in figures or tables. In the second step, there was an in-depth analysis and discussion about the results. Answers to the four research questions were found out as well in this section.

3.1 Results
Data collected from three questionnaires were analyzed and presented in order of the level, types, effects and causes of ESL writing anxiety as well as students’ perceptual learning style preference in English writing course.

3.1.1 The level of ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors
Research Question 1
Is there any second language writing anxiety among Chinese English majors? And to what level?
The results of the SLWAI (Questionnaire I) showed that there is a high level of ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors (see Table 1). Sophomores were found to suffer higher levels of ESL writing anxiety than the freshmen (see Table 2 and Table 3). The differences in the levels of anxiety between two groups reach the level of statistical significance (see Table 3 and Table 4).

As introduced in Method, the SLWAI (Questionnaire I) consists of 22 items, scored on a Five-point Likert response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Five of the items (1, 4, 17, 18, 22) were negatively worded and were reversely scored before being summed up to yield total scores. A higher score obtained thereupon indicates a higher level of ESL writing anxiety. A total score above 65 points indicates a high level of writing anxiety, a total score below 50 points indicates a low level of writing anxiety, and a total score in-between indicates a moderate level of writing anxiety.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of the SLWAI, which shows a high level of ESL writing anxiety (Mean=66.49, >65) among Chinese English majors. The possible scores on the SLWAI range from 22 to 110. The participants’ scores in this study ranged from 38 to 96. The mean score was 66.49, which reflected a high level of anxiety. In addition, 57 students (59%) were found to have high levels of anxiety, which might reinforce the conclusion that there is a high level of L2 writing anxiety among Chinese English majors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>66.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High anxiety</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>75.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate anxiety</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>57.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low anxiety</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>44.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 and Table 3 present the separate descriptive statistics of the SLWAI of the two groups. The freshmen in general have moderate levels of English writing anxiety (M=62.57, <65). The sophomores, on the other hand, have high levels of English writing anxiety (M=70.57, >65). It is obvious that the sophomores suffer higher levels of English writing anxiety (M=70.57) than the freshmen (M=62.57).

It also can be seen from Table 2 and Table 3 that more sophomores than freshmen were found to experience high levels of ESL writing anxiety. The statistics in Table 2 show that 23 freshmen (47%) were found to experience high levels of ESL writing anxiety. The results in Table 3 indicate that 34 sophomores (72%) had suffered high levels of anxiety.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the SLWAI (freshmen)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>62.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High anxiety</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>72.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate anxiety</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>57.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low anxiety</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>46.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the SLWAI (sophomores)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>70.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High anxiety</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>76.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate anxiety</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>57.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low anxiety</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 4 and Table 5, the differences in the level of English writing anxiety between the groups of freshmen and sophomores (p=0.002, <0.05) reach the
level of statistical significance. The results revealed that sophomores were found to suffer significantly higher levels of English writing anxiety (M=70.5745) than the freshmen (M=62.5714). English writing anxiety in this study appears to increase with increased time of study.

Table 4. Two independent samples t-test for equality of Means and Levene's Test for Equality Variances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variance</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety Equal variance assumed</td>
<td>F  0.030, Sig. 0.863</td>
<td>T = -3.166, Sig. (2-tailed) 0.002, Mean Difference -8.0030, Lower -12.0262, Upper -2.9828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety Equal variance not assumed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of two independent samples t-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.2 The types of SLWA

The SLWAI offers a three-dimensional conceptualization of anxiety, such as Somatic Anxiety, Cognitive Anxiety, and Avoidance Anxiety (Cheng, 2004). By calculating the scores of the items related to each category, the distribution of the three types of ESL writing anxiety were presented in Figure 1. It is obvious that Cognitive Anxiety is the most common type of L2 writing anxiety experienced by both freshmen and sophomores.
Figure 1. Types of SLWA (general)

Figure 2 presents the differences in the types of SLWA between the freshmen and the sophomores. For each type of ESL writing anxiety, the sophomores were found to suffer higher levels of writing anxiety than the freshmen, because the mean score of each type of anxiety of the sophomores is higher than that of the freshmen.

Figure 2. Types of SLWA (comparison between freshmen and sophomores)
3.1.3 Effect of ESL writing anxiety on writing performance

Research Question 2

Does ESL writing anxiety have a negative or positive effect on writing performance?

The results in Table 6 revealed a significant negative correlation between measure of ESL writing anxiety and measures of student achievements (course grade and timed writing grade). It indicates that a high level of ESL writing anxiety is negatively related to writing performance. The correlations appear in Table 6 and Table 7, and will be discussed in section 3.2.

**Correlation between ESL writing anxiety and course grade**

Table 6 shows a significant negative correlation between writing anxiety and course grade ($r=-0.879$). It means students who experienced higher writing anxiety also received lower course grades.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Course Grade</th>
<th>Anxity Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kendall's tau_o</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.379**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**| Correlation Coefficient | Anxiety Degree |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-.879*</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation between ESL writing anxiety and timed writing grade**

The results of Table 7 show a significant negative correlation between writing anxiety and timed-writing grades ($r=-0.838$). In other words, students who reported higher writing anxiety had lower writing proficiency grades than those who reported lower writing anxiety.
Table 7. Correlation between writing anxiety and writing performance (writing grade)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kendall's tau_b</th>
<th>Writing Grade</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Grade</td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anxiety Degree</td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anxiety Degree</td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

3.1.4 Causes of ESL writing anxiety

Research Question 3

What are the main causes of writing anxiety for Chinese ESL learners?

Figure 3 presents the results of Questionnaire II, and ranks the main causes of ESL writing anxiety in order of the numbers of the students who agreed or strongly agreed with the statements of eight items.

As can be seen in the figure above, 80 students (83%) thought their English writing anxiety stemmed from linguistic difficulties, such as inadequate mastery of vocabulary, simple sentence structures, and grammatical errors. 77 students (80%)
thought they lack writing practice inside and outside the classroom. 76 students (79%) worried about writing English compositions in tests, especially TEM Band 4 and TEM Band 8 (Tests for College English Majors in China). 67 students (70%) reported that they usually had no idea about the topic and what to write, in particular when writing English compositions under time constraint. 60 students (63%) lack confidence in L2 writing achievement, which made them feel upset. 45 students (49%) were afraid of negative evaluation from teacher and fellow students. 43 students (45%) attributed L2 writing anxiety to insufficient writing techniques. 38 students (40%) thought the teacher’s feedback on their English composition was not adequate and effective, which made them anxious.

Figure 4 and Figure 5 present the separate results of anxiety causes for the freshmen and the sophomores. Two figures have something in common, as the first five causes of English writing anxiety were found to be the same for the two groups. On the other hand, there were some differences between the two groups. For instance, for the freshmen, insufficient writing practice was regarded as the most important factor that caused their English writing anxiety (82%), while for the sophomores, fears of tests (TEM) amounted to the first reason of ESL writing anxiety (87%). In addition, 25 freshmen (51%) reported experiencing anxiety caused by low self-confidence in ESL writing, while 37 sophomores (75%) were found to have the same experience.

Figure 4. Causes of ESL writing anxiety for freshmen
3.1.5 Learning style preferences in ESL writing class

Table 8 and Table 9 present the results of self-perceptual learning style preferences in ESL writing class, which would provide pedagogical implications of learning and teaching strategies for coping with ESL writing anxiety (see 3.2.2).

Table 8 shows that Chinese ESL learners strongly preferred auditory, kinesthetic, visual and tactile learning styles in the English writing class. Sophomores indicated more visual than freshmen, while freshmen were more auditory than sophomores. Both groups strongly preferred to learn kinesthetically and tactilely.

Table 8. Learning style preference means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Visual</th>
<th>Auditory</th>
<th>Kinesthetic</th>
<th>Tactile</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomores</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Preference means 38 and above = major learning style preference; means of 25-37=minor learning style preference; means of 24 or less = negligible learning style preference.

Table 9 presents the percentages of the students whose scores for each category of...
major learning style preferences reached 38 and above. The general column reflected the ratio of students who preferred the four major styles to the total number of students (96). The results were corresponding to Table 8, in other words, they also indicated that Chinese students had strong preferences for auditory, kinesthetic, visual and tactile learning styles in ESL writing class. In addition, more sophomores strongly preferred visual style, and more freshmen preferred auditory style.

Table 9. Learning style preferences percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major learning style preferences</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Freshmen</th>
<th>Sophomores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td>69 (72%)</td>
<td>39 (57%)</td>
<td>30 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesthetic</td>
<td>64 (67%)</td>
<td>33 (52%)</td>
<td>31 (48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>62 (65%)</td>
<td>27 (44%)</td>
<td>35 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactile</td>
<td>56 (58%)</td>
<td>27 (48%)</td>
<td>29 (52%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Discussion and implications

Based on the results presented in 3.1, there was a discussion on the levels, types, causes and effects of ESL writing anxiety. Furthermore, suggestions on learning and teaching strategies for reducing ESL writing anxiety were provided with a consideration to the present ESL learning situation in Chinese colleges.

3.2.1 Discussion on the levels, types, causes and effects of ESL writing anxiety

Levels of ESL writing anxiety

The results of the SLWAI (Questionnaire I) show there is a high level of ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors.

A significant difference in anxiety level was found between freshmen and sophomores, that is, sophomores in this study were found to suffer higher levels of English writing anxiety than freshmen. Previous work concerning ESL writing anxiety reported no
significant difference in anxiety level between the groups of freshmen, sophomores and juniors; although L2 writing anxiety appeared to increase with increased time of study as freshmen reporting the lowest level of English writing anxiety and the juniors are of highest level (Cheng, 2002). One apparent reason why Chinese sophomores have significantly higher levels of English writing anxiety than the freshmen is TEM Band 4 which is set at the second year in college. TEM Band 4 is a national-wide test for college English majors and is of great significance for most Chinese English majors, because it is not only considered as a standard of education achievement by both educational authorities and teachers, but it has also been widely accepted by society, such as the job-hunting market. TEM is an overall test including listening, reading, writing and speaking. Writing occupies 25% of the total score. Test takers would be asked to write two English compositions under time constraint. The pressures of the test and time make students much more anxious than usual. Sophomores might be more sensitive to TEM than freshmen since the test is at hand, which also corresponds to the results of Figure 5 in which fear of tests (TEM) ranks number one among the causes of English writing anxiety for sophomores.

*Types of ESL writing anxiety*

The results of the SLWAI also indicate that Cognitive Anxiety is the most common type of ESL writing anxiety experienced by Chinese English majors. As mentioned in Theoretical Background, Cognitive Anxiety deals with negative expectation, fear or worry of negative evaluation and tests. Thus, the result revealed a fact that Chinese students have high pressures of tests and evaluation in ESL writing, which corresponds to the findings in this study that fears of test and negative evaluation are the main factors associated with ESL writing anxiety for Chinese students (see 3.1.4), and supports Cheng’s conclusion (2004: 331) that cognitive anxiety related closely to test anxiety and could have a great influence in L2 writing performance. Students with the fear of test or fear of any evaluative situation frequently experience cognitive interference and have difficulties on focusing on the writing task at hand.
In addition, the results in Figure 2 show that for each type of L2 writing anxiety, the sophomores were found to have higher levels of anxiety than the freshmen, which means the sophomores have more unpleasant physiological responses, cognitive interference and avoidance behaviors than the freshmen when writing in English. The results were consistent with the findings that ESL writing anxiety appears to increase with increased time of study (Cheng, 2002).

Effects of ESL writing anxiety on writing performance

Table 6 and Table 7 show significant negative correlations between the measure of ESL writing anxiety and measures of writing performance (both course grade and timed writing proficiency grade). This finding indicates a negative relationship between ESL writing anxiety and writing performance.

A great number of previous studies concerning FLA/SLA indicated that high levels of anxiety could have negative effects on students’ language performance overall and for specific language skills (Cheng et al., 1999; Cheng, 2004; Hassan, 2001; Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). The present study was consistent with and supported these earlier conclusions, providing specific evidence for the negative effects of ESL writing anxiety on ESL learners’ overall course grades and on their timed writing performance as well.

It should be pointed out that ESL writing anxiety can have other negative effects, for example on learners’ behavior; it may also cause physical symptoms. Referring to the results of Questionnaire I, most students reported that they experienced avoiding writing English compositions or avoiding situations that require writing in English. It is widely acknowledged that writing is a productive activity and needs a certain quantity of practice. Avoidance behavior, as a result of ESL writing anxiety, would in turn be harmful to L2 writing improvement and cause higher anxiety. Some students reported physical effects of writing anxiety. They experienced various symptoms of anxiety more or less, such as accelerated heartbeat, perspiration and blushing.
Causes of ESL writing anxiety for Chinese English majors

The results of Questionnaire II showed that linguistic difficulties, insufficient writing practice, fear of tests, lack of topical knowledge and low self-confidence in English writing achievement are the most common problems of L2 writing perceived by Chinese English majors, and also constitute the main sources of English writing anxiety in this study.

83% of the students thought their English writing anxiety stemmed from linguistic difficulties, such as inadequate mastery of vocabulary, simple sentence structures, and grammatical errors. The result was consistent with the study of Hyland (2003: 34) which claimed that most immediately obvious factor that distinguishes ESL writers is the difficulty they have in adequately expressing themselves in English. 70% of the students reported that they usually had no idea about the topic and what to write, in particular when writing English compositions under time constraint. Previous works about second language writing pointed out that time, topic and language might be important factors of poor ESL writing as well as writing anxiety (Hyland, 2003; Leki & Carson, 1997). For instance, Hyland cites Leki and Carson’s (1997) ESL students’ statement on their experience in L2 writing (Hyland, 2003: 41):

*Time is the problem. Each time I write a paper in English I have to spend a lot of time to organize. So if you give me just a limited time, I cannot do very well.

*There are sometimes subjects you never think to write about those. For example, they say write about a custom or an important value. I never thought about writing them.

*My principal objective in my English class is my grammar, not the idea, because sometimes the idea,...I made [up] the idea.*

The statement above reflects important concerns of ESL learners about ESL writing acquisition, which is consistent with the results of the present study. Most Chinese ESL learners would be too concerned about linguistic components when writing in English, such as sentence structure, grammar rules and correct spelling, as accuracy is
always regarded as the principal objective for L2 teaching and learning, especially for evaluation. Thus, students’ self-perception of their linguistic difficulties turned out to be the most important reason for anxiety. Meanwhile, unlike L1 writing, in which creative ideas are often motivated and highly evaluated by the teacher, over emphasis on linguistic accuracy in L2 writing, to some degree, prevent students from creative and extensive thinking. Therefore, they might have nothing to say about the topic of an English composition, especially in a situation of time control, such as a timed writing task. As mentioned by Arnold (1999) in Theoretical Background, the learners’ general levels and profiles of language ability and topical knowledge can influence their affective responses to writing tasks.

As for the factor of insufficient writing practice, it seems universal for L1 and L2 language anxiety. 80% of the students thought that the less time they spent writing in English, the more anxiety they would experience. It is easy for L2 learners to make such a conclusion by their L1 acquisition experience. Self-perception of insufficient writing practice would make students feel more anxious. Practice plays a very important role in the language learning process, especially between the stages of “Input” and “Output”. According to Tobias’ model (1979), anxiety could be aroused in three-stages of language learning: Input, Processing, and Output, and in turn, it could have effects on the performance in these three stages. Insufficient time spent on information processing cannot accommodate ESL writers well in the productive activities at the Output stage; as a result, it would make the writers feel less confident of their writing achievements. Cultural factors should not be neglected when Chinese students would like to transfer experience in L1 learning to L2 learning, because practice has been valued highly in Chinese traditional cultures and educational principles.

Fear of tests, in particular fear of TEM, was found to be another important factor of ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors, as 79% of the students worried about writing English compositions in tests. As mentioned in Theoretical Background,
fear of failure in tests is very pervasive in school contexts, because writing is a productive activity influenced strongly by time pressure; even the brightest and most-prepared students often feel much more anxious than usual and make more errors in test-taking situations (Horwitz et al., 1986). It should also be pointed out that the L2 writing process involves not only linguistic differences between two independent language systems but also cultural differences. Tests, or evaluations in a broader sense, have very important roles in determining students’ academic performance, and even their future careers considering the background of the traditional Chinese education system which has been examination-oriented for a long period of time. Although more and more changes and reforms have taken place in the present educational system, traditions still have considerable effects on every sphere in life. TEM Band 4 and Band 8 are now widely accepted as authoritative measures of the English levels of Chinese English majors. The important position of TEM and its far-reaching effects made itself a very important reason for ESL writing anxiety of Chinese English majors.

63% of the students lack confidence in L2 writing achievement and improvement, which makes them upset. Frustration may come from high expectations of the objectives but low self-confidence in the achievement in English writing. Negative evaluations from teacher or fellow students could strongly influence one’s self-confidence of writing level and improvement. Improvement in ESL writing is time-consuming, which may also frustrate some students who have a relative lack of motivation. As can been seen in Figure 4 and Figure 5, 75% of the sophomores reported experiencing anxiety when their English writing levels seemed to stand still, while 51% of the freshmen were found to have the same experience. It might indicate that students were likely to increase their expectations of ESL writing achievement with increased time of learning, meanwhile, they were much more sensitive to or anxious about any progress in English writing since ESL writing improvement is time-consuming.
3.2.2 Pedagogical implications (Suggestions on learning and teaching strategies for reducing ESL writing anxiety)

Research Question 4
What learning and teaching strategies can be used to successfully deal with ESL writing anxiety?

ESL teachers should know the sources of ESL writing anxiety as well as students’ learning style preferences in the writing class so that classes could be organized in a manner which reduces or minimize anxiety.

An in-depth analysis of the main causes of ESL writing anxiety revealed a number of factors which were identified as the main sources of ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors, such as linguistic difficulties, insufficient writing practice, fear of test (TEM), lack of topical knowledge and low self-confidence in writing achievement. Teachers of ESL writing should acknowledge these factors of ESL writing anxiety at first. Then teachers should help students to bring meta-cognitive, cognitive and affective strategies to ESL writing tasks which can greatly facilitate the learners’ development (Oxford, 2001: 166-172; Hyland, 2003: 31-53). Some successful strategies used in L1 writing could be positively transferred into L2 writing. For instance, strategies like memorizing and imitation are favored by most Chinese students in L1 learning because in Chinese traditional culture, the repetition and reproduction of existing knowledge are highly valued. Sufficient practice with appropriate use of these strategies can have positive effects on ESL writing improvement so as to reduce the students’ English writing anxiety. For instance, through memorizing and imitating, students can be familiar with different topics and genres of English writing, especially the genre of TEM writing, which could also be helpful for them to overcome writing anxiety caused by tests. In this process, the teacher should provide students with sufficient information and materials as well as adequate opportunities of guided practice. However, it should be pointed out that as the goal of ESL writing, learning and teaching should neither stand at the level of
vocabulary and grammar nor at techniques in dealing with tests. Instead, creative ideas and successful communication should be considered first and greatly encouraged. On the other hand, repetition and reproduction can be used as strategies of facilitating for ESL writers to develop from immature writing to mature writing. At the same time, guided practice is needed to avoid plagiarism.

As for the coping strategies for reducing the ESL writing anxiety caused by low self-confidence and fear of negative evaluation, some researchers suggested that teacher evaluation should be reduced; instead, it should be substituted by peer- or self-evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986; Hassan, 2001; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990). This strategy may not be effective in practice since teacher evaluation is valued highly by Chinese students. Moreover, peers are not trained teachers and their comments may be vague, and not constructive. The English levels of students should also be taken into consideration when discussing whether peer-evaluation or self-evaluation should be adopted or not.

For students of high English levels, peer- and self-evaluation can be used as an auxiliary method to teacher evaluation, which may help to improve students’ confidence in their English writing. For instance, ESL learners can learn to use self-evaluation effectively by means of checklists, diaries, or journals which help them to evaluate their writing progress as well as their feelings involved in writing tasks. They can review samples of their own work, note the style and content of the writing, and assess progress over time. They can also compare their writing with the writing of their peers or with that of more proficient writers. For the students of relatively low levels, self-evaluation or peer-evaluation may not be effective because they may not be able to provide constructive comments on their own writing as well as others’. Therefore, what might be a practical and effective strategy for reducing ESL writing anxiety caused by low self-confidence and fear of negative evaluation is to make some changes to the teacher evaluation system. For example, teachers can assess students’ writing confidence as they assess students’ writing competence. One
strategy suggested by previous studies is the teacher’s positive response to student writing (Cheng, 2001; Hyland, 2003). Teachers could give more positive remarks that can be motivating as many students pay great importance to them. On the other hand, teachers should provide constructive criticism because students do not welcome empty praise. Generally speaking, teachers should keep a balance between being realistic in pointing out errors and problems of students’ writing and being motivating to students.

It is desirable to establish a learner-centered and less-threatening classroom context to reduce ESL writing anxiety. As can be seen in Theoretical Background, Process – oriented teaching approaches are focused more on the writing process that students go through than on the results of writing, which can be helpful to relieve anxiety. Moreover, a supportive and non-threatening learning atmosphere can be established in the ESL writing classroom if the students can write in their flawed L2 without embarrassment, if their contribution is adequately valued, if activities lead to feelings of achievement, not failure, and if teachers are willing to offer more encouragement and positive feedback (Cheng, 2002). Writing is commonly seen as a three-stage process including pre-writing, writing and rewriting. In the past, teachers maybe concentrated on the product of writing, but neglected students’ emotional states and teacher-student interactions at the pre-writing and writing stages. Now, however, the importance of all three stages as part of the writing process is increasingly recognized by more and more Chinese writing teachers as well as their roles in helping students master the process by participating in it with them. They are increasingly aware that classroom procedures and activities can be and should be organized in a manner which suits learners’ learning style preferences.

The results of Table 8 and Table 9 suggested that Chinese ESL learners strongly preferred auditory, kinesthetic, visual and tactile learning styles in English writing class. Sophomores were more visual than freshmen, while freshmen were more auditory than sophomores. The findings of Chinese students’ learning style preference
can help both teachers and students make use of appropriate strategies which will effectively facilitate English writing performance. For instance, freshmen with an auditory preference can make full use of the materials for writing, such as lectures, conversations, group or pair work involving information transfer, reasoning and discussion, and they will work well on these activities. Sophomores who prefer visual style may respond well to reading source texts, writing class journals, and transferring information from graphic, textual, or video material. Knowing about students’ learning style preferences helps writing teachers to choose suitable teaching strategies to accommodate these preferences in the ESL writing class. For instance, writing teachers will devise instruction types, writing tasks and activities which take the differences in learning style preferences into consideration and which maximize the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of them all.

4. Summary and conclusion
This study investigated the levels, causes, and effects of ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors, and suggested learning and teaching strategies for reducing ESL writing anxiety.

The main findings obtained from this study can be summarized as follows:

1) There is a high level of ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors; among three types of ESL writing anxiety, the Cognitive Anxiety is the most common anxiety. The differences in the level of English writing anxiety between the groups of freshmen and sophomores reached the level of statistical significance. The sophomores were found to suffer significantly higher levels of English writing anxiety than the freshmen.

2) ESL writing anxiety of Chinese English majors negatively correlated with their English writing course grades and timed writing grades, which provides specific evidence for the negative effects of high levels of ESL writing anxiety on writing
performance.

3) Linguistic difficulties, insufficient writing practice, fear of tests (TEM), lack of topical knowledge and low self-confidence in writing performance constitute the main sources of ESL writing anxiety experienced by Chinese English majors.

4) Some learning and teaching strategies, such as learners’ learning style preferences, process-oriented approaches, and positive statements, can be used successfully to facilitate ESL writing performance and to reduce ESL writing anxiety.

In conclusion, ESL writing is a cognitive, emotional and cultural process. ESL writing anxiety and its role in ESL learning achievement need to be understood and deserve attention from ESL writing researchers, ESL writing teachers as well as ESL learners. Only if we acknowledge the existence of ESL writing anxiety, identify the causes and effects of it, can we cope with it successfully and effectively.
References


Boston, Massachusetts: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.


Appendix 1
ESL Writing Anxiety Questionnaire I—based on Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) (Cheng, 2004)

Name:  
Gender: Male    Female  
Academic Year:    ---- Freshman  
                 ---- Sophomore  
Date:  

Instruction:
1. Read the following statement and express your degree of agreement / disagreement by ticking (√) the appropriate column.
2. Note that SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, U=Uncertain, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. While writing in English, I’m not nervous at all.</td>
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<td>2. I feel my heart pounding when I write English compositions under time constraint.</td>
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<td>3. While writing English compositions, I feel worried and uneasy if I know they will be evaluated.</td>
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<td>4. I often choose to write down my thoughts in English.</td>
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<td>5. I usually do my best to avoid writing English compositions.</td>
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<td>6. My mind often goes blank when I start to work on an English composition.</td>
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<td>7. I don’t worry that my English compositions are a lot worse than others’.</td>
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<td>8. I tremble or perspire when I write English compositions under time pressure.</td>
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<td>9. If my English composition is to be evaluated, I would worry about getting a very poor grade.</td>
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<td>10. I do my best to avoid situations in which I have to write in English.</td>
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<td>11. My thoughts become jumbled when I write English compositions under time constraint.</td>
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<td>12. Unless I have no choice, I would not use English to write composition.</td>
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</table>
13. I often feel panic when I write English compositions under time constraint.
14. I’m afraid that other students would deride my English composition if they read it.
15. I freeze up when unexpectedly asked to write English compositions.
16. I would do my best to excuse myself if asked to write English compositions.
17. I don’t worry at all about what other people would think of my English compositions.
18. I usually seek every possible chance to write English compositions outside of class.
19. I usually feel my whole body rigid and tense when I write English compositions.
20. I’m afraid of my English composition being chosen as a sample to be discussed in class.
21. I’m not afraid at all that my English compositions would be rated as very poor.
22. Whenever possible, I would use English to write compositions.
**Appendix 2**

ESL Writing Anxiety Questionnaire II — by Zhang Hongxia

**Instruction:**
1. Read the following statement and express your degree of agreement / disagreement by ticking (√) the appropriate column.
2. Note that SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, U=Uncertain, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I write English compositions,</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. I usually have no idea about the topic and what to write, in particular when I write English compositions under time constraint.</td>
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<td>2. While writing English compositions, I often encounter some linguistic difficulties, such as inadequate mastery of vocabulary, simple sentence structures, and grammatical errors.</td>
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<td>3. I’m afraid of negative evaluation of my English compositions from teacher and fellow students.</td>
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<td>4. My English writing skill stands still which makes me feel upset.</td>
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<td>5. I’m lack of writing practice inside and outside classroom.</td>
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<td>6. I don’t think I have a good command of composition techniques. For instance, I’m too much concerned about the forms and formats.</td>
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<td>7. I don’t think the teacher’s feedback on my English writing is sufficient and effective.</td>
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<td>8. I’m much worried about writing English compositions in TEM Band 4 and TEM Band 8 (Tests for College English Majors in China).</td>
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Appendix 3

ESL Writing Anxiety Questionnaire III --- based on Reid’s perceptual learning style preference questionnaire (Richards, 1996: 51)

Instruction:
This questionnaire has been designed to help you identify the ways you learn best. Please respond to the statements below as they apply to your English writing learning. Express your degree of agreement / disagreement by ticking (✓) the appropriate column. Note that SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, U=Uncertain, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When the teacher tells me the instructions, I understand better</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I prefer to learn by doing something in class</td>
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<td>3. I get more work done when I work with others</td>
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<td>4. I learn more when I study with a group</td>
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<td>5. In class, I learn more when I study with a group</td>
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<td>6. I learn more by reading what the teacher writes on the board</td>
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<td>7. When someone tells me how to do something, I do better</td>
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<td>8. When I do things in class, I do better</td>
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<td>9. I remember things I have heard in class better than things I have read</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. When I read instructions, I remember them better</td>
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<td>11. I learn more when I can make a model of something</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. I understood better when I can read instructions</td>
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<td>13. When I study alone, I remember things better</td>
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<td>14. I learn more when I make something for a class project</td>
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<td>15. I enjoy learning in class by doing experiment</td>
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<td>16. I learn better when I make drawings as I study</td>
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</table>
17. I learn better in class when the teacher gives me a lecture
18. When I work alone, I learn better
19. I understand things better in class when role-playing
20. I learn better in class when I listen to someone
21. I enjoy working on an assignment with two or three classmates
22. When I build something, I remember what I have learned better
23. I prefer to study with others
24. I learn better by reading than by listening to someone
25. I enjoy making something for a class project
26. I learn best in class when I can participate in related activities
27. In class, I work better when I am alone
28. I prefer working on projects by myself
29. I learn more by reading text books than by listening to lectures
30. I prefer to work by myself

Scoring: There are five questions for each category, grouped in the following way:

Visual (6, 10, 12, 24, 29)       Auditory (1, 7, 9, 17, 20)       Kinesthetic (2, 8, 15, 19, 26)
Tactile (11, 14, 16, 22, 25)    Group (3, 4, 5, 21, 23)          Individual (13, 18, 27, 28, 30)

Adding the scores for each category and multiply by 2, results can be understood as:

Major learning style preference 38-50
Minor learning preference 25-37
Negligible 0-24