

English Writing Block among Chinese Non-English Majors

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Abstract: Most Chinese college students have been experiencing writing block in their English writing. In this paper, Chinese non-English majors' English writing blocks were examined based on the quantitative data and the descriptive research method by a survey questionnaire. The respondents were first and second year students and those majoring in both science and liberal arts. The respondents identified language block as the most significant block in their English writing. Structure block and mental block followed closely with means of 2.72 and 2.71, respectively. In addition, the differences in responses when grouped according to profile were tested. It was found that male students and those majoring in science exhibited higher evaluations in terms of structure block compared to their counterparts. Students from rural areas showed greater assessments in language block when compared to students from urban areas. Accordingly, in terms of the language block, an intervention plan was formulated in order to enhance to English teaching and writing.

Keywords: English writing block; language block; mental block; structural block.

1. Introduction

Writing is a complex and essential skill in second language acquisition, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing. English writing block is chosen as the variable Chinese college students may encounter when attempting to produce a written text, such as difficulty in generating ideas, organizing information, and expressing themselves effectively. Studying English writing block can help students and educators better understand the factors that contribute to writing difficulties and develop effective strategies to mitigate them.

Writing block is known as writer's block. Writer's block is an inability to begin or continue writing for reasons other than a lack of basic skills or commitment (Rose, 1984, as cited in Salem, 2018) [1]. Also, Sasmita and Setyowati (2021) present that writer's block is a condition when a writer faces a mental blockade, rendering them unable to proceed with their writing tasks or the incapacity to initiate the process of writing something novel [2]. The brief history of research on writer's block may be presented as follows. Early observations of writer's block can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with writers and psychologists recognizing the phenomenon and its impact on productivity and creativity. However, it was not until the mid-20th century that systematic investigations into writer's block began to emerge.

In a word, writing block can negatively impact the writing performance and productivity of EFL learners, creating challenges in their language development and academic pursuits. Students facing writing block may experience lower grades, decreased motivation, and increased stress and frustration. In professional settings, writing block can hinder career advancement, limit opportunities for promotion, and result in missed deadlines. Furthermore, writing block can lead to decreased self-esteem and hinder communication in personal relationships. Understanding the dynamics of writing block in EFL writing is crucial for educators, researchers, and practitioners seeking to support learners'

language development and enhance their writing skills.

2. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Summary Table on English Writing Block

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Language Block	2.88	Agree	1
Structure Block	2.72	Agree	2
Mental Block	2.71	Agree	3
Composite Mean	2.77	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 1 presents a summary of the respondents' evaluation of their overall English writing block in terms of language block, structure block, and mental block. The composite mean which is 2.77 indicates that in general, the respondents agreed with the evaluation. Among the three indicators, language block received the highest weighted mean of 2.88, indicating that the respondents identified it as the most significant block in their English writing. Structure block and mental block followed closely with means of 2.72 and 2.71, respectively. This suggests that while language block was perceived as the primary challenge, the respondents also acknowledged that structure block and mental block played a role in hindering their writing in English.

The presence of writing blocks among students particularly in the context of English writing is a well-documented phenomenon. Sasmita and Setyowati (2021) point out that writing in English poses a significant challenge for students, particularly for those who are learning English as a foreign language (EFL); students often find writing to be a difficult and even stressful task [2]. It is important to understand that these blocks are not indicative of a lack of intelligence or

ability on the part of students. Instead, they can be attributed to various factors, including language proficiency, unfamiliarity with the writing process, self-confidence issues, and fear of making errors.

The ranking of language block as the primary writing obstacle aligns with the challenges faced by language learners. Writing in a second language involves a complex set of skills, including vocabulary selection, grammar usage, and sentence structure. Widagdo (2017) provides a summary of research findings indicating that many English as a foreign language (EFL) learners face multiple challenges when it comes to writing in their second language; additionally, it is observed that while writing, students tend to prioritize language-related issues over other aspects.[3] Difficulties in these areas can understandably impede the writing process and create a barrier for students.

The prominence of structure block and mental block also highlights common challenges encountered in English writing. Richards states it is widely acknowledged that writing is the most challenging skill for second language learners to acquire; the difficulty in writing, extending beyond generating and organizing ideas, also involves effectively translating those ideas into coherent and comprehensible written text (Azizah, 2013) [4]. Structure block means some difficulties in organizing thoughts effectively and constructing coherent and cohesive arguments or narratives. In Widagdo's (2017) analysis, it was highlighted that logical organization is a crucial aspect of effective writing; however, many students tend to neglect the proper structure of a

beginning, middle, and end in their writing; they often fail to include an effective topic sentence, supporting details, and a concluding line; moreover, students struggle to develop a clear understanding of their writing topic, resulting in a lack of coherent ideas and insufficient information; the analysis also revealed a lack of structure, unity, and the presence of irrelevant ideas in the students' writings; these findings indicate the difficulties students face while writing in English are apparent [3].

Mental block, on the other hand, includes psychological aspects such as anxiety, lack of confidence, and self-doubt, which can hinder students' ability to express themselves in writing. The factors associated with the internal aspects of students can be alternatively referred to as psychological factors, and Brown suggests that the psychological aspects of students can be recognized by analyzing their affective factors (Dwihandini, et al., 2013) [5]. An additional instance can be illustrated, like the point raised by Jabali (2018): if students lack self-assurance and are unwilling to express their emotions through writing, it is unlikely for them to achieve proficiency in writing [6].

Overall, addressing the mental block in English writing requires a combination of psychological, linguistic, and strategic approaches. Advocating for these writing blocks does not suggest that they should be seen as impossible obstacles that cannot be overcome or as long-term challenges. Instead, it emphasizes the need for targeted support and interventions to help students overcome these challenges.

Table 2. Difference of Responses on English Writing Block When Grouped According to Profile

Sex	F-value	p-value	Interpretation
Language Block	0.518	0.472	Not Significant
Structure Block	4.322	0.038	Significant
Major			
Language Block	0.113	0.737	Not Significant
Structure Block	3.850	0.050	Significant
Mental Block	2.052	0.153	Not Significant
Grade Level			
Language Block	1.383	0.240	Not Significant
Structure Block	0.000	0.994	Not Significant
Mental Block	0.013	0.908	Not Significant
Home location			
Language Block	10.035	0.002	Significant
Structure Block	1.645	0.200	Not Significant
Mental Block	0.098	0.754	Not Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.05

Table 2 shows the comparison of responses on English writing block when grouped according to profile. It was observed that there was significant difference on structure block when grouped according to sex and major. This was observed because the obtained p-values were less than the alpha level. This means that the responses vary statistically and based on the test conducted, it was found out that male and students major in science have greater assessment than others.

The data suggests that males have shown a statistically significant greater assessment in structure block of English writing compared to their female counterparts. This could potentially indicate a difference in understanding, application, or approach towards the structure of English writing between males and females. It might suggest that males have a better grasp or are better taught about sentence structures, paragraph

coherence, or the logical flow of ideas.

Likewise, the research of Rahman and Hashmi (2019) indicated that male students exhibited greater proficiency in areas such as sentence construction, handwriting, and understanding tenses compared to their female counterparts [7].

However, this does not mean one gender is innately better than the other; it could be a result of various external factors like teaching methods, societal influences, or individual preferences in learning or could be the different cognitive approaches adopted by males in structuring sentences or arguments, perhaps leaning more towards a logical or linear progression of ideas.

Furthermore, students majoring in science have a higher assessment in the structure block in this survey. Science majors are often trained to write lab reports and research

papers, which require a methodical approach and a strong focus on structured, logical argumentation. This experience might provide them with an edge in understanding and applying structural elements proficiently in English writing. For example, in writing a lab report, a science major would be good at following a structured format comprising an introduction, methodology, results, and discussion, perhaps making them more skilled at adhering to structured writing formats.

This is consistent with the research findings of Wang, et al. (2020), in the application of English writing strategies, students majoring in science perform better than students of liberal art; there are significant differences between students majoring in science and students majoring in arts in terms of cognitive strategies; one possible reason is that science students' coursework involves more cognitive thinking training, which can be transferred to their English writing strategies; on the other hand, liberal arts coursework tends to focus more on retaining knowledge and involves less training in cognitive thinking; additionally, another reason for science students' proficiency in using cognitive strategies may be that the learning methods of humanities students are more closely related to language learning [8].

Also, there was also significant difference on language block when grouped according to location. This significant difference lies on those who are from rural area. Urban areas often have more exposure to the English language, be it in signboards, businesses, entertainment, or daily interactions.

Urban areas might have better access to digital platforms, online resources, and tools that help enhance language skills. Rural areas might have limited access to quality educational resources, including fewer skilled teachers or inadequate learning materials. The lack of advanced internet or technology infrastructure in rural areas can pose challenges, too.

The research of Li (2015) further supports this claim: by examining papers from recent years' College Entrance Examinations, it was observed that rural students tend to receive lower scores in writing compared to their urban counterparts; the reasons for this disparity are multifaceted, stemming from the increasingly pronounced gap between urban and rural areas; the socio-cultural, educational, and familial environments experienced by students in these two regions differ significantly; additionally, rural students typically possess a broader knowledge base, including a deeper understanding of the English language, as well as a more open-minded cognitive ability; these factors contribute to their relative advantage in writing ability [9].

While the findings in this research provide a basis for understanding the variations in English writing blocks in terms of language block and structure block among different groups, they should be understood cautiously, considering the potential influence of other unexamined factors and avoiding the formation of stereotypes or biases. It is essential to foster an environment that supports all students in developing their skills comprehensively.

Table 3. English Writing Enhancement Plan for Chinese Non-English Majors

Key Result Area	Writing block
Objective	To address student' language block hindering their writing progress
Strategies and activities	1.Vocabulary enhancement: vocabulary-building exercises and activities to enhance students' word repertoire; 2.Spelling mastery plan: spelling quizzes and practice sessions to improve word spelling skills; 3.Grammar refinement: grammar lessons and exercises targeting common writing errors; 4.Lexical diversity initiative: synonyms and antonyms exploration to expand students' vocabulary options; 5.Personal vocabulary expansion: regularly integrate new words into writing assignments, creating a personalized word repertoire; engage in self-directed spelling practice sessions, using memory aids or devices or flashcards to reinforce correct spelling.
Success Indicators	1.90% of students demonstrate an increase in their vocabulary knowledge and usage; 2.90% of students show improvement in word spelling accuracy; 3. 90% of students exhibit enhanced grammatical proficiency; 4.Increased familiarity and utilization of synonyms and antonyms in writing. 5.90% of students overcome language block by regularly incorporating new words into assignments, and effectively applying correct spelling in their written work.
Persons involved	Teachers and students

3. Conclusion

The respondents in the study consisted of first- and second-year non-English majors from a public university. Most of the respondents acknowledged experiencing writing block in their English writing. The main block reported was language block, followed by structural block and mental block. Male students and those majoring in science exhibited higher evaluations in terms of structure block compared to their counterparts. Students from rural areas showed greater assessments in language block when compared to students from urban areas. Teachers and students may adopt some

strategies and activities, such as vocabulary enhancement, and grammar refinement to overcome writing block as well as improve English writing learning and teaching. Moreover, researchers may conduct comparative studies across different universities or countries, which may provide valuable insights into effective practices and approaches.

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