EFFECTS OF STUDENTS’ MAJORS AND LEARNING STYLE PREFERENCES ON THEIR WRITING APPREHENSION IN THE COMPOSITION OF CLASSICAL CHINESE POETRY

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ABSTRACT
Writing apprehension is one of the primary issues that impede students’ willingness to compose classical Chinese poetry. It refers to the negative and anxious feelings that undermine their self-confidence in fulfilling writing goals. This paper aims to measure the levels of writing apprehension of Chinese undergraduate students in the composition of classical Chinese poetry and explore whether majors, preferences of situated and sensory learning styles contribute to any significant differences in their writing apprehension levels. The potential factors that mainly influence their attitudes are also investigated. The respondents include 100 undergraduate students at the Guilin University of Electronic Technology in China. The quantitative findings firstly indicated that the students had a moderate level of writing apprehension, and those who majored in Chinese were more anxious than those who majored in English. Secondly, students who preferred the tactile learning style had the lowest level of writing apprehension. However, there were no significant differences in their writing apprehension levels regarding majors and preferences of learning styles. Moreover, the qualitative findings suggested that the six factors that mainly led to the writing apprehension were: the choice of words and sentences, the expression of thoughts and emotions, the establishment of themes and subject matter, the selection of poetic templates, the creation of imagery and aesthetic conception, and the use of artistic techniques. The results highlight the awareness and necessity of poetry writing instruction. It is recommended that similar research be done on a larger scale in China.

Keywords: classical Chinese poetry, writing apprehension, learning style preferences, majors, causes of writing apprehension

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INTRODUCTION

Writing has received a great deal of attention in both academic and daily settings. It is recognized as an essential communication skill for success as it allows the ideas to be vividly reflected and articulated via the use of words. One of the most effective ways for enticing students to write is to instill a sense of creativity in them and give them opportunities to construct their thoughts as freely as possible. Obviously, creative writing plays a pivotal role in the improvement of writing since it generates a willingness for students to play with the language by adding unique personal meanings. Focusing on feelings, physical sensations, intuitions and musicality, creative writing is more right-brain oriented than left-brain oriented. It requires students to manipulate language in an engaging way that will aid language development at all levels (Maley, 2009). In the Chinese context, students are encouraged to memorize roughly a hundred poems starting at a young age, and the instruction of classical Chinese poetry has grown increasingly significant due to its remarkable artistic and cultural value. According to Xu et al. (2018), classical Chinese poetry continues to captivate us with its rhythmic beauty, rich emotions and concise structure. Unfortunately, even though students can use their senses to learn these poems from textbooks, the writing of classical Chinese poetry maintains challenging. As pointed out by Krashen (1982), what they are taught is filtered through the affective domains and they lack the requisite skills to perform well on writing tasks. As a result, writing anxiety may occur in the process of organizing the ideas, creating the imagery and selecting the language. Moreover, the more severe their writing apprehension, the higher the possibility of students being less competent writers (Qadir et al., 2021). Previous research has indicated that writing apprehension needs to be examined in a variety of contexts with different education levels to open more gates for the development of anxiety-reduction measures (Cocuk et al., 2016). However, less attention has been paid to the levels of writing apprehension and the difficulties encountered in the composition process in the context of Chinese poetry. There were models based on the automatic generation of classical Chinese poetry by adopting online software (Wu et al., 2021), but no comprehensive studies have been performed when it comes to manual writing. Moreover, in the process of composing a poem, the mobilization of five senses and cognitive skills is required. As different students may perceive information, interact with the environment and be inspired by the outside world differently, the investigation of their preferred learning styles also has far-reaching implications in terms of the writing of classical Chinese poetry. Hence, in this study, we attempt to look into the levels and causes of writing apprehension of 100 Chinese undergraduate students and explore whether the difference in their majors and learning styles will affect the way they acquire knowledge and compose poems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

China is a country of poetry, and classical Chinese poetry is an indispensable part of Chinese poetic tradition. Since learning and inheriting traditional Chinese culture was incorporated into the general education for school students, “Poetry Project on Campus” has been widely welcomed by schools at all levels. Courses such as “Classical Poetry Composition”, “Classical Poetry Appreciation”, “Classical Poetry Recitation” and “Classical Poetry Translation” have been offered on various campuses. The live broadcast of the “Classical Chinese Poetry Conference” by CCTV in 2016 has further promoted this project to such an extent that “Classical Poetry Composition” becomes an elective and popular course on university campuses, and some primary and middle schools even begin to teach the composition of
classical poetry. Wei and Geng (2022) also claimed that China now is witnessing the revival of classical poetry writing, and this revival is going to exert a far-reaching impact on poetry education in the context of new liberal arts. However, given that Chinese poetry education has long been input-oriented, most students did not compose classical poems before enrolling in a university. As they have to consider many components to weave a poem, writing apprehension always occurs in the composition process. Nevertheless, no research has been conducted on writing apprehension in classical Chinese poetry education so far.

Writing apprehension refers to “a situation and subject-specific individual difference associated with a person’s tendencies to approach or avoid situations perceived to potentially require writing accompanied by some amount of perceived evaluation” (Daly & Wilson, 1983, p. 327). It is a kind of anxiety trait that affects students’ motivation, self-concept, interpersonal interaction, and writing accomplishment. Reeves (1997) mentioned that apprehensive students have a harder time coming up with new ideas and usually score lower in syntactic development. Thus, it is evident that writing anxiety is a major issue that requires diagnosis (Qadir et al., 2021). However, in investigating writing apprehension, there were studies focused on academic writing (Ajmal & Irfan, 2020; Akhtar et al., 2020) and essay writing (Britt et al., 2018; Jawas, 2019; Toba & Noor, 2019). Little research has been carried out on the apprehension in poetry writing. Meanwhile, for measuring the level of writing apprehension, different researchers have developed different measurement scales. The most famous one was the Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) developed by Daly and Miller (1975) for measuring native writers’ anxiety. WAT questionnaire had 26 items in total, with half the positive statements and half the negative statements. To calculate the score of writing apprehension, the formula \( WA = 78 + PSV - NSV \) should be followed. Apart from the WAT, another scale for gauging writing apprehension was introduced by Petzel and Wenzel (1993). It was a more complicated one that involved 103 items. Cheng (2004) also developed a tool called Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory for measuring ESL and EFL writing apprehension levels. No matter how many new measuring tools have been formulated, the WAT maintains the most popular one as it is the first scale developed in the relevant field. The questions in WAT can be answered in a very short time and can be used by students at all stages of education. In this study, we are curious about the levels of writing apprehension by Chinese students. Therefore, it is a need to adapt WAT questionnaires that target native writers.

Moreover, when native Chinese students compose classical poems, they have to use all their senses to perceive information from the outside world and get inspiration. According to the learning styles hypothesis by Pashler et al. (2008), everyone has a preferred behavior or modality for processing information, and if they are provided with and engaged by the material in that chosen modality, learning will be facilitated in some way. Thus, it is important to know whether the difference in learning style preferences will influence the students’ poetry writing apprehension. Learning styles can be further categorized into situated and sensory learning styles. The theory of situated learning acknowledges that learning is dependent on the activity and environment in which it happens, and individual learning and group learning may be beneficial to different students. The theory of sensory learning takes visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic styles as the basic perceptual ways of acquiring knowledge. Before composing classical Chinese poems, students may respond to the environment in various ways. Those whose learning preference is visual usually concentrate on the depiction of information from texts, notes, maps, diagrams, charts, graphs, and all the symbolic items. The students who prefer
the auditory style may like listening to the lectures, oral explanations, audiotapes, and discussions in a certain atmosphere. The tactile ones are more inclined to hands-on experiences and touching concrete things to stimulate their memory. The students with kinesthetic learning styles like active participation or physical movement in a number of activities such as moving to a space and doing role-play. Previous studies have shown the relationship between learning style preferences and writing apprehension in the ESL academic context (Alizadeh Tari & Roslin, 2021), but in the creative writing settings, whether learning style preferences will contribute to any significant differences remained unclear. Besides, as these Chinese undergraduates are from different majors, there is also a need to explore if the writing apprehension level will be affected by their field of study. Accordingly, the research objectives and the research questions in this study are presented as follows:

**Research Objectives**
1. To measure the levels of writing apprehension in the composition of classical Chinese poetry by undergraduate students.
2. To investigate whether majors, preferences of situated learning styles and sensory learning styles contribute to any significant differences in their levels of writing apprehension.
3. To explore the causes of writing apprehension in their composition of classical Chinese poetry.

**Research Questions**
1. What are the levels of writing apprehension in the composition of classical Chinese poetry by undergraduate students?
2. How do the students’ levels of writing apprehension in classical Chinese poetry differ by their majors, their preferences of situated learning styles and sensory learning styles?
3. What are the causes of writing apprehension in their composition of classical Chinese poetry?

**METHODODOLOGY**

**Research Design**
This research used a mixed approach that integrated quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method was applied to measure the students’ levels of writing apprehension in classical Chinese poetry composition and check the statistical differences in writing apprehension scores between those who were from different majors and those who had different learning style preferences. The qualitative method was adopted to discover the various causes that lead to the writing apprehension in the composition of classical Chinese poetry.

**Sample Description**
The sample of this study included a total of 100 Chinese undergraduate students who were randomly selected out of 160 students aged around 20 from Chinese and English majors at the Guilin University of Electronic Technology in China. As shown in Table 1, 50 participants were enrolled in each major. Their first language is Chinese, and they have taken a course in classical Chinese poetry composition in the second semester of the academic year 2022.
Table 1. Summary of the Participants’ Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Average Time in Filling Questionnaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Major (50)</td>
<td>Male (18)</td>
<td>Max: 27</td>
<td>6 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Major (50)</td>
<td>Female (82)</td>
<td>Min: 19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Instruments
To measure their levels of writing apprehension in the composition of classical Chinese poetry, the Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) questionnaire by Daly and Miller (1975) was adapted. It was commonly used for testing L1 writing apprehension on a 5-Point Likert Scale specifying the degree of agreement. The adapted questionnaire in this study included 26 items with 13 positive and 13 negative statements, and it was shown to be an instrument that had internal consistency, reliability and predictive validity. For determining the score for each sample, all positive statements’ values (PSV) were firstly added together, and all negative statements’ values (NSV) were secondly added together. Then we followed the formula “WA= 78 + PSV - NSV” that was proposed by Daly and Miller (1975) to discover the final writing apprehension scores of the participants. The final scores may range from 26 to 130 and they were categorized into 3 groups. If the final scores ranged from 97 to 130, the students would have a low level of writing apprehension. If ranged from 60 to 96, then there would be a moderate level of writing apprehension. If ranged from 26 to 59, a high level of writing apprehension needed to be reported.

Besides, to answer the second research question, demographic information was also required. Hence, the questionnaire has been added with nominal data on the students’ majors, the preferences of their situated learning styles and sensory learning styles.

Finally, to further explore the causes that lead to students’ writing apprehension in the composition of classical Chinese poetry, we asked for their further explanations by using some open-ended questions to get their feeling, understanding and knowledge about why the writing apprehension occurred and how it occurred in the different phases in the writing process. The responses were not limited to a set of options but in free forms.

Data Collection Procedures
The adapted questionnaire on “writing apprehension in classical Chinese poetry composition” has been sent to 100 undergraduate students. They filled in the questionnaire by scanning the QR code on the poster made by the application software Questionnaire Star. It took about 6 minutes to answer all the questions. The answers were automatically collected in the Questionnaire Star, from which the researcher could download the results in an Excel file. The data deduction and refinement were also done by clearing the invalid and missing data by the researchers.

Data Analysis Procedures
To measure the levels of writing apprehension of Chinese undergraduates in their composition of classical Chinese poetry, the data we collected was first inserted into a software SPSS for further analysis. The normality test on writing apprehension scores was conducted as well. As the skewness value was -.211, and the kurtosis value was .373, all of which were between ±2, the distribution of the data was normal and bell-shaped. Then we used descriptive statistics to...
investigate the frequency, percentage, and mean scores of writing apprehension in a total of 100 students.

To answer the second research question, we used inferential statistics. An Independent Sample T-test was processed to investigate whether the students’ majors contribute to the differences in their writing apprehension scores. Meanwhile, One-way ANOVA was adopted to test the differences in writing apprehension scores among preferences of the situated learning styles and sensory learning styles. The situated learning styles were categorized by those who preferred individual learning, group learning, or those who equally like individual and group learning. The sensory learning styles were categorized into four groups, which were visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic learning styles.

After knowing the differences, we listed the potential factors that mainly influence their writing apprehension by the open-ended survey. These factors were further analyzed based on the types of writing apprehension. More than the basic evaluation, stress and product apprehension, other factors which were closely linked to the specific features of classical Chinese poetry were also found and discussed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Levels of Writing Apprehension in Classical Chinese Poetry Composition

To answer the first research question which intended to reveal the extent to which Chinese undergraduate students experience apprehension when composing classical Chinese poetry, data from the collected questionnaires were computed through SPSS. The formula proposed by Daly and Miller (1975b) was used. Table 2 and Table 3 report the descriptive results for the writing apprehension level.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics about the Writing Apprehension Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WA Scores (N=100)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80.61</td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>119.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the mean, minimum, and maximum scores of the undergraduates’ writing apprehension in the composition of classical Chinese poetry. The results suggested that there was a moderate level of writing apprehension in a majority of students as the average score of 80.61 was within the score range of 60 to 96. Meanwhile, the minimum and maximum scores were 36.00 and 119.00 respectively, indicating that there were students who were undergoing either high or low writing apprehension in the composition of classical Chinese poetry. Hence, the detailed distribution of the levels of writing apprehension would be discussed in Table 3.

Table 3. The Levels of Writing Apprehension in Classical Chinese Poetry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups of Writing Apprehension</th>
<th>Scores</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>97-130</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>60-96</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>26-59</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 summarizes the levels of writing apprehension of a total of 100 Chinese undergraduate students. The three-level groups are low, moderate and high, each with a range of overall writing apprehension scores. It could be seen from the results that 82% of the students
had moderate writing apprehension, followed by those whose apprehension was low (10%). However, there were 8% of students who maintained a high writing apprehension. This indicated that more than 3/4 of the undergraduate students had moderate anxiety in the writing of classical Chinese poetry. Though their first language is Chinese, difficulties lie in the sub-components of various stages of the writing process. The current finding is novel as previous studies have not investigated writing apprehension in the context of native poetry composition.

**Differences in Writing Apprehension Levels Across Majors and Preferences of Learning Styles**

**Differences in Writing Apprehension Levels Between Majors**

To answer the second research question which sought to identify the differences in writing apprehension levels between students’ majors, the SPSS program was also employed for outputting results. Descriptive statistics were acquired from the responses of the students by using the mean, standard deviation. Independent Samples T-test was used to test the statistical significance of the difference.

Table 4. The Independent Samples T-test for Writing Apprehension and Majors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>78.82</td>
<td>15.26</td>
<td>-1.271</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>.207</td>
<td>-.917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>82.40</td>
<td>12.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the results in Table 4, the overall students who majored in Chinese (M = 78.82, SD = 15.26) scored slightly lower than students who majored in English (M = 82.40, SD = 12.80). From the mean of both groups, it could be seen that students in these two majors had a moderate level of writing anxiety in classical Chinese poetry. Moreover, Chinese major students seemed to suffer more from writing anxiety than English major students. This can possibly be attributed to the fact that Chinese major students have a higher awareness of their responsibility, which is to provide qualified services and build collaborative platforms for people around the world to approach the Chinese language and understand Chinese culture. Since classical Chinese poetry is the essence of Chinese culture, Chinese major students have pressure on how to construct these poems before teaching others.

According to the results of the Independent Samples T-test, t (98) = -1.271, p = .207, 95% CI [-9.17, 2.01], since the significant value was greater than alpha at .05 level of significance, there was not sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. It could be concluded that there was no significant difference between the writing apprehension scores of the students from the two majors in classical Chinese poetry composition.

**Differences in Writing Apprehension Levels Among Preferences of Situated Learning Styles**

To identify the differences in writing apprehension levels among students’ preferences of situated learning styles, the SPSS program was used to generate the results. Since there were more than two categories of learning styles, descriptive statistics and One-way ANOVA were applied.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics Results of the Writing Apprehension Scores Among Preferences of Situated Learning Styles
Based on Table 5, it could be seen that in a total of 100 participants, 55 students preferred individual learning, 42 students equally liked individual and group learning, and only 3 students were more inclined toward group learning. From the mean score, the students from these three categories kept a moderate level of writing apprehension. However, those who were from the group learning category had the lowest mean score, which suggested that they maintained the highest writing apprehension among the three groups. Those who equally liked individual and group learning had a comparatively lowest writing apprehension level among the three categories as their mean scores were 83.33. This implicated that the combination of the situated learning styles could make a contribution to releasing the writing anxiety. A possible explanation could be that it was easier for the students to get inspired and motivated through group learning, while through individual learning, they became calm and could make a note of their emotions. Moreover, a contrast grade was generated in the students who preferred individual learning styles as the minimum and maximum scores of writing apprehension fell in this category.

Table 6. One-way ANOVA Results for Preferences of Situated Learning Styles and Writing Apprehension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WA</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>545.548</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>272.774</td>
<td>1.376</td>
<td>.257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>19222.242</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>198.167</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19767.790</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 6, since the significant value (.257) was larger than α at .05 level of significance, we didn’t have enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, it could be concluded that there were no statistically significant differences among students who preferred individual learning, group learning and who equally liked both styles of learning. This result indicated that whatever the situated learning styles of the students, they kept a moderate level of writing apprehension in classical Chinese poetry writing.

**Differences in Writing Apprehension Levels Among Preferences of Sensory Learning Styles**

To identify the differences in writing apprehension levels among students’ preferences of sensory learning styles, the SPSS program was used to generate the results. Descriptive statistics and One-way ANOVA were applied.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics about the Writing Apprehension Scores in Classical Chinese Poetry Among Preferences of Sensory Learning Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Apprehension Scores</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>78.46</td>
<td>13.56</td>
<td>51.00</td>
<td>102.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>77.88</td>
<td>10.09</td>
<td>62.00</td>
<td>94.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactile</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>83.74</td>
<td>19.58</td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>119.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesthetic</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>83.65</td>
<td>10.46</td>
<td>68.00</td>
<td>102.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>80.61</td>
<td>14.13</td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>119.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7 shows the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores in writing apprehension in classical Chinese poetry among the four groups. According to the students’ most preferred sensory learning styles, we categorized them into visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic groups. Of a total of 100 students, half of them fell in the visual group, followed by 23 in the kinesthetic group, 19 in the tactile group and 8 in the auditory group. Based on the average scores of the writing apprehension in classical Chinese poetry composition, the levels of writing anxiety from high to low were auditory (77.88), visual (78.46), kinesthetic (83.65) and tactile (83.74) groups. Though the students from all the four groups had a moderate level of writing apprehension, students whose sensory learning style preference was tactile had the lowest anxiety. This result is meaningful as in the writing process, the students who enjoy the tactile style cherish the opportunity to touch pen and paper, and write down their flowing thoughts. This suggests that when there is a connection between hand and brain, the students will be more engaged in the learning process. Hence, to lower the writing apprehension in poetry writing, hands-on activities are a need for students.

Table 8. One-way ANOVA Results for Preferences of Sensory Learning Styles and Writing Apprehension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>689.593</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>229.864</td>
<td>1.157</td>
<td>.330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>19078.197</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>198.731</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19767.790</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 8, since the significant value (.330) was larger than α at .05 level of significance, we did not have enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, it could be concluded that there were no statistically significant differences among students who preferred visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic learning styles. This result indicated that whatever the sensory learning styles of the students, they kept a moderate level of writing apprehension in classical Chinese poetry. The reasons may be retrieved from the input-based mode of education which leads students to recite poems rather than write.

Factors of Writing Apprehension in Classical Chinese Poetry

Classical Chinese poetry is a genre produced in classical Chinese and characterized by certain traditional forms and techniques. To compose classical Chinese poetry, most writers would first determine the style of their poems. However, according to our survey, the undergraduate students have not been systematically trained on how to set their style in writing a poem, and some of them even felt scared about what to write and how to write. Thus, even though their visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic senses could be activated, they had a moderate level of writing apprehension in classical Chinese poetry composition.

To further investigate what actually caused this apprehension, the researchers categorized their problems from the perspective of the elements of classical Chinese poetry. Specifically, the content and form are the two branches that constitute the style of a poem. Table 9 demonstrates the sub-elements of content and form that need to be taken into consideration.
Table 9: The Sub-elements in the Composition of a Classical Chinese Poem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Style of a Classical Chinese Poem</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td><strong>Form</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The establishment of themes and subject matter</td>
<td>The selection of the poetic templates (structures and types)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expression of thoughts and emotions</td>
<td>The choice of words and the building of sentences (tones, rhymes and rhythm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The creation of imagery and aesthetic conception</td>
<td>The use of artistic techniques (poetic devices)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the results, the above sub-elements were pointed out 267 times in total, some of which occurred repeatedly as the students had several problems at the same time in the writing process of classical Chinese poetry. Due to these occurrences, Figure 1 indicates how much proportion of the writing problems was caused by the components of content and form of classical Chinese poetry.

![Figure 1. Causes of Writing Apprehension in Classical Chinese Poetry Composition](image)

From the results, it can be seen that all six factors affect the students’ level of writing apprehension. The most dominant factor is related to the choice of words and the building of sentences, accounting for 23.6% of the occurrences of all the problems. There are several possible explanations for this result. Firstly, the students are confused about the language between classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese. They are not sure whether they can compose classical poems in a modern language. Secondly, in the writing of classical Chinese poetry, there are some rules that need to be followed. In English poetry, the metrical patterns are formed by foot and meter, and the meter is determined by the regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. However, in classical Chinese poetry, the metrical patterns are relying on the tones as the Chinese character is largely monosyllabic. Hence, concerning the tones, each Chinese
character has either the even tone or the oblique tone, and there is a general rule called “the first, third and fifth characters of a line needn’t follow the tone pattern, but the second, fourth and sixth must abide strictly by it” (Hsueh-Chin & Ngo, 1978). Moreover, there are rhyming rules regarding the last characters in the writing process. It can be concluded that it is these complicated rules that mostly cause the writing apprehension in classical poetry composition.

The second prominent factor is the expression of thoughts and emotions. According to the results, 22.5% of problems in writing apprehension are caused by the lack of confidence to express ideas through poetry. In the survey, many students claimed that they lost their inspiration for writing poems in the examination-based environment. They learned knowledge more from textbooks than from daily life, and poetry seemed quite far from their inner heart. Therefore, the pedagogical implication of this finding is that as teachers, it is better to create a poetic atmosphere in the classroom and guide them to be courageous in writing down their ideas and emotions.

The next major factor that causes writing apprehension in classical Chinese poetry is the difficulty in making choices among various themes and subject matters, and 15.7% of the writing anxiety can be explained by it. As we know, there are a series of themes in classical Chinese poetry, such as the poems on landscapes, the poems on the frontier fortress, the poems that recall the past, the poems that describe inner feelings invoked by external objects, etc. However, the students seemed not to have an awareness of writing down these things that once caught their eyes or left them a memory. Hence, it is a need for us to develop poetry education, evoke their writing interest and give them prompts to record the moments that once drew their attention.

The fourth factor that generates writing apprehension in classical Chinese poetry composition is the selection of poetic templates. The templates usually show the structures and types of poems. According to the number of characters, the number and the length of lines, and the tonal and rhyming regulations, there are various types of classical Chinese poetry. The most popular ones are Gushi, Jintishi, Ci, Qi, and Fu. There are few constraints apart from line length for Gushi but a series of formal rules for Jintishi, which involves the eight-lined regulated verse Lūshi, the four-lined Chinese quatrain Juejū, and the linked couplets of indeterminate length Pailū. Moreover, in Lūshi and Juejū, the lines are made up of five or seven characters. As a result, a cause of writing anxiety in classical Chinese poetry composition is that the students are not quite familiar with the composition criterion for the various types and structures of these poems. Since 14.2% of the writing anxiety is caused by this factor, a step-by-step learning process is necessary for them.

Another factor that produces writing apprehension in classical Chinese poetry composition depends on the creation of imagery and aesthetic conception. Based on the figure, 13.1% of anxiety derives from it. Imagery does not only paint a picture but aims to produce a sensuous impression in poetry. By using the language that appeals to the five senses, the content will become rich and profound, and the writers’ thoughts and emotions can be effectively conveyed (Hui, 2000). More than imagery, the term aesthetic conception was originally put forward by renowned Tang poet Wang Changling. It refers to a strong aesthetic experience in which a person’s perception of an object achieves a state of complete harmony with the connotation the object signifies. Therefore, in the composition of classical Chinese poetry, the
students are supposed to intensely observe the object, develop the sentiments in their minds and project meaning into the scene.

The last factor that leads to writing apprehension in classical Chinese poetry is the use of artistic techniques. Though only 10.9% of the anxiety can be traced back to this factor, we shouldn’t ignore it. As poetry is generally a sort of indirect expression, the writers usually express their ideas through poetic devices which include sound devices and figures of speech. The common sound devices are repetition, alliteration, assonance and rhyme, while the figures of speech involve simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, allusion, metonymy, paradox, irony, etc. If the students want to lower their anxiety, these techniques are also needed to be grasped as they will help in enhancing description and leaving an effect on the reader.

CONCLUSION

This paper made an investigation of students’ majors, learning style preferences, and potential factors towards writing apprehension in classical Chinese poetry. Some tentative conclusions can be drawn as follows: First, the majority of the students in this study experience a moderate level of writing apprehension. Second, in terms of writing apprehension, there is no significant difference between the two majors, the three situated learning styles and the four sensory learning styles. Third, according to the sequence of importance, the six factors that lead to writing apprehension are the choice of words and sentences, the expression of thoughts and emotions, the establishment of themes and subject matter, the selection of poetic templates, the creation of imagery and aesthetic conception and the use of artistic techniques.

The results have generated some pedagogical implications in poetry composition. It is important for the language instructors to be aware of the students’ levels of writing apprehension, to notice their individual differences in perceiving information, to recognize their preferences of learning style, and to understand the specific difficulties in the writing of classical Chinese poetry. For releasing the students’ writing apprehension, the instructor can develop administrative and instructional practices that target the sub-elements of poetry writing, put more emphasis on the choice of words and sentences, the expression of thoughts and emotions, the establishment of themes and subject matter, the selection of the structures and types of poems, the creation of imagery and aesthetic conception, and the use of artistic techniques.

The limitation of this research lay in the small size of the sample. This study was confined to analyzing 100 undergraduate students from one university in China. In the future, the sample size could be enlarged and contained more participants of different ages from different regions. Meanwhile, since only the poetry writing apprehension was investigated in the Chinese context, the results could not be generalized to other genres in creative writing. It would be interesting to conduct similar research on other genres of creative writing in China.

REFERENCES


