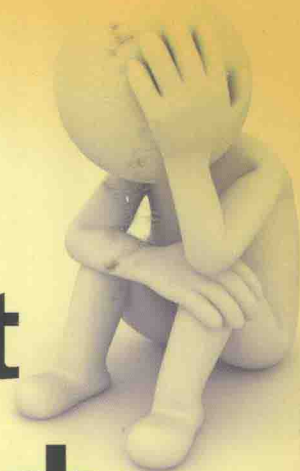


# English Test Anxiety Study



Dong Mei

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石油工业出版社

## 内 容 提 要

《English Test Anxiety Study》是跨学科的研究成果总结，涉及外语教学、语言测试、教育心理学、心理测量学和统计学等多个学科。本书在大量调查访谈的基础上，深入探寻了英语考试焦虑的特点和本质，详细介绍了英语考试焦虑的诊断、测量及其与其他焦虑类型的关系，并探讨了英语考试焦虑研究对外语教学、语言测试和教育心理学等领域研究的启示作用，可以为英语教学改革提供理论依据。

本书适合国内外高校英语教师、英语专业研究生和高年级本科生以及对英语教学研究感兴趣的人群阅读。

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## Preface

Different from the other countries, much greater importance has been attached to English education by college students in China in recent few decades. English has even surpassed Chinese to become one of the most anxiety provoking subjects among students. In this study, the writer has found via interview that most of the sample students have spent even more efforts and time learning English than subjects which they major in.

It is no exaggeration to say that English proficiency has become a widely recognized standard for talent selection and evaluation in this oriental part of the world. No matter what industry are you in, medicine or literature, history or mathematics, mechanics or chemistry, the reality is that if you cannot demonstrate satisfactory scores in English proficiency tests, you will be given no opportunity in terms of both professional and academic promotion. In the case of graduate student selection in Mainland China, higher scores in English proficiency tests may offer test-takers greater priority. No matters how excellent are you in the field, in which you are specialized, poor English proficiency alone may make you refused by any higher institution.

Driven by such a tendency, various kinds of English proficiency tests are becoming unprecedentedly popular among Chinese people, old and young. Among them, the College English Test Band IV and VI (hereafter abbreviated as CET-4 and CET-6) are the two that are the most talked about and worried ones. Students who fail the CET-4 are not able to get their bachelor's degrees, while those failing CET-6 may not be welcome by any graduate school. That is why CET-4 and CET-6 are regarded as tests that may re-write a student's destiny in mainland China. Due to their importance and relevance to the study, this book will offer some space to introduce CET-4 and CET-6 as well as English education since 1949 in its Introduction part. Hopefully, through them, readers may get a glimpse of China's English education from 1949 to this day and understand the necessity of this study much better.

The importance of English Proficiency Tests to test-takers has called for fair evaluation and valid inference to the performance of test-takers. However, little has been done in this field. Although researchers (e. g. , Bachman and Palmer, 1996) have agreed that the performance of test-takers is associated with the interaction of test-tasks and test-takers' personal characteristics, both classical and modern testing theories for interpreting test scores have neglected to mention the influence of test-taker's personal characteristics, among which test anxiety is one of them. As a result, the performance of anxious test-takers is usually misinterpreted. This will also be explained in details in Introduction.

Part of the reality associated with the misinterpretation of test-takers English proficiency is due to the lack of specific scale for measuring some of the affective factors, among which English test

anxiety (hereafter abbreviated as ETA) is recognized to be one of the most disturbing ones experienced by test-takers. It is absolutely necessary to develop a scale to calculate it. Thus, great pain has been taken to develop English Test Anxiety Scale (hereafter abbreviated as ETAS). The main goal of it is to identify test-anxious students under English proficiency test situation as well as demonstrate statistically the anxiety level of those anxious test-takers. The whole design process of ETAS is introduced in details within Chapter Two. Prior to it, right in Chapter One, the writer introduces the previous findings and latest development of test anxiety research, with an expectation that they could offer some hints to the study of ETA.

Reliability and validity studies of ETAS are also conducted to demonstrate the psychometric properties of the scale. Specific information regarding this is included in Chapter Three of this monograph.

Since research results indicate that ETAS is an instrument with acceptable reliability and validity, with the help of it, the writer has further examined the dimensionalities of ETA as well as its relationship with other kinds of anxieties, such as the State anxiety, Trait anxiety, general test anxiety, English-speaking, listening, reading and writing anxieties as well. This is recorded in Chapter Four.

Chapter Five explains how to use ETAS and the significance of the ETAS scores. It is aimed to help researcher, teacher and student identify English test anxious personnel and interpret ETAS grades so as to find ways to provide them with targeted assistance.

In the Conclusion part, the writer answers all the research questions of this study. She also highlights the main finding and discusses in detail its implications for L2 (Second Language Learning) teaching and learning, test anxiety research and future research as well. At the very end of this book, the writer mentions the limitation of the study with a kind expectation that future researchers may improve the survey and contribute new insights to this field.

Research questions involved in this monograph include:

1. How to measure ETA construct?
2. How are the reliability and validity of ETAS?
3. What is the nature of ETA construct?
4. Does a test-taker experience equal ETA level across the four language skills, including speaking, listening, reading and writing?
5. What is the relationship between ETA and other kinds of anxiety, including State anxiety, Trait anxiety, general test anxiety, as well as English-speaking, listening, reading and writing anxieties?

Students from Xi'an Shiyou University based in Xi'an, the capital city of Shannxi province of the People's Republic of China, have taken part in the study. A moderately large sample of 254 students is involved. All of them had reported experience in CET-4 or CET-6. They were chosen at random on campus.

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods are adopted in this research. Data analysis methods include Primary Components Analysis, ANOVA, T-test, regression analysis, partial cor-

relation analysis and correlation analysis.

Research results show that ETAS is acceptable in terms of external reliability ( $\alpha = 0.75$ ) and internal reliability (Guttman Split - Half Coefficient = 0.56). All of the items of ETAS are significantly correlated with the total scores, except Items 5 and 3, indicating Item 5 and Item 3 perhaps are not associated with test anxiety in the English proficiency test situation. Since 90% of the items of ETAS are significantly correlated to the total score, it can be concluded that ETAS is of high logic validity. Besides, ETAS is significantly correlated with the Westside Test Anxiety Scale at 0.56%, indicating relatively high criterion validity.

Through an exploratory factor analysis, four language skill - specific factors, one affective factor and one behavioral factor are identified within the construct of ETA. They are named ETA - Listening, ETA - Speaking, ETA - Reading and ETA - Writing Anxieties, as well as Interpersonal Skills and Lack of Practice. Among them, ETA - Listening anxiety is the key element, which explains more than 55% of the total variance. Further t - tests show that test - takers possibly experience the same level of ETA - writing and ETA - reading test anxieties, but different levels of ETA - listening and ETA - speaking test anxieties.

A series of correlation analyses demonstrates that ETA is more a sort of State Anxiety than Trait Anxiety. It is highly correlated with the English Listening Anxiety. All of the subcomponents of ETA are weakly correlated with English Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing Anxieties respectively, indicating a strong overlapping effect of the subcomponents of the ETA.

Of course, as what is mentioned in the end of this book, all of the conclusions drawn in the study are needed to be further proved by replicated empirical experiments. Any kinds of comments and suggestions are greatly welcome by this writer.

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The School of Foreign Languages,  
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# Chapter 1 Introduction

Before getting down to the main topic, the writer would like to spend some space on introducing English education in China, which is expected to serve as part of the background knowledge of this study. The focus will be put on the particular period from 1949 to now.

Right after that, efforts will be made to explain the necessity of developing an instrument for measuring anxiety levels of test – takers under the situation of English proficiency tests.

Besides, research goals, questions, and design of the study will also be demonstrated in detail in this section.

## 1.1 English Education in China

The development of English education since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 has clear characteristics. It clearly reflects the socio – political changes (Adamson 2002, 2004; Adamson and Morris, 1997; Cortazzi and Jin, 1996; Hildebrandt and Liu, 1991; Jin and Cortazzi, 2006; Lam 2002, 2005, 2007; Ross, 1993; Xu, 1990) in China over time. Generally, three periods are identified by researchers (Hayhoe, 1991; Lam, 2002), namely the First Period (1949 – 65), the Second Period (1966 – 76) and the Third Period (1977 onwards).

However, as it is difficult to be clear – cut about each period, the writer of this paper would like to adopt the following way of division Russian Domination, English Replaced Russian in China, Back to English Education, the Exploration Period, as well as the Reform Period. Besides, the unprecedented English Learning Craze in China will be mentioned in particular in order to help readers get a clear picture about the status quo of English education in mainland China.

### **1. 1. 1 Russian Domination**

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, to align itself with the Soviet Union for political and economic security, the Chinese government attached great importance to the teaching and learning of Russian. Several notable events during this period included that in 1949, Russian lessons started to be broadcast on the Beijing People's Broadcasting Station. In 1951, a National Plan to teach Russian and to train 10000 cadres with certain proficiency of Russian by 1954 was announced. In 1955, a three-year syllabus for Russian majors at university level was set down for implementation from 1955 to 1956.

By the year of 1951, Russian departments were established in at least 34 universities and colleges across China. Although English was also taught as a school subject during this period, it was not treated as an important subject. In 1953, a press report from the Central Government emphasized the importance of English in the secondary school curriculum since English was an international language, though Russian had to be taught so as to learn from the "Elder Brother" of the Soviet Union. In 1956, Zhou Enlai announced that it was necessary to expand foreign language education. As a result of this, in the same year, draft syllabi for teaching Russian and English in senior secondary school were distributed.

### **1. 1. 2 English Replaced Russian in China**

In late 1950s, the Chinese government increasingly realized that the Soviet Union could not be relied upon as it had never regarded China as its equal. China started to look to the West. Consequently, English replaced Russian to become the most important foreign language in China. In 1960, Beijing Foreign Language School was established, where English was taught from grade three of the elementary school as a pilot scheme. In the next year, the syllabus for English majors at university and college level was introduced. According to that syllabus, the four principles for student evaluation were: 1) having a deep love for the country and a global point of view; 2) mastering the English language, English/American literature, history, politics, economics, culture along with Chinese language and literature; 3) high English proficiency with focus on reading ability; 4) good health. In 1962, the first English syllabus for non-

English majors was distributed. By the year of 1964, the reality was that there were not enough experts in English and there was an oversupply of Russian majors. Therefore, a three – year plan for sending 2000 students abroad to learn English and other languages was announced. Meanwhile, English was established as the primary foreign language in higher education. By 1965, 14 foreign language schools training learners in foreign languages from Primary 3 were in place in Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Sichuan, Nanjing, Changchun, Wuhan, Hangzhou, Tangshan, Hairpin, Guangzhou, Luda and Xi'an (Adamson, 2004).

Unfortunately, in 1966, the Culture Revolution broke out, which lasted until 1976 and made the learning of everything foreign condemnable. Classes stopped. English education experienced a serious setback. Many foreign language teachers and students were brought to the rural area for labor work. They suffered a lot and some of them even committed suicide since they feel hopeless for themselves as well as the future of China. It was regarded as the darkest period.

### **1. 1. 3 Back to English Education**

Entering 1970s, two historic events helped the renewal of English education in China. In 1971, the People's Republic of China replaced Taiwan to become a member of the United Nations. In February 1972, Richard Nixon, the president of the United States, visited China. Since then, the Chinese government began to conduct commercial, cultural and educational exchanges with the United States (Lam, 2002). Many intellectuals in China quickly realized that English would become more and more important in the near future. They started to teach their children English secretly at home because even after Nixon's visit, the learning of foreign languages was considered as taboo in mainland China. Listening to the VOA or BBC would arouse suspicion and discomfort from neighbors. In 1976, the beloved Chairman Mao left his 800 million followers forever, which signified the end of the Culture Revolution. Ever since then, China has quickened its pace for modernization.

### **1. 1. 4 The Exploration Period**

The 1980s had seen the period when Deng Xiaoping's Four Modernizations (Agriculture Modernization, Industry Modernization, National Defense Modernization, as

well as Science & Technology Modernization) were announced, which soon developed into the Reform and Opening – up period. This had made it absolutely necessary for Chinese to learn English. In August 1980, the English Teaching Syllabus for Science and Technology University Students was promulgated by the Ministry of Education. According to this syllabus, the goal of English teaching among universities was to enhance reading ability of the students in order to help them understand scientific and technological materials. Interestingly, it mentioned nothing about the speaking, listening and writing skills. It did not provide a vocabulary list, either. In 1982, English was announced as the main foreign language in secondary school. Two College English syllabi were completed for implementation in 1985 and 1986, one for university students of science and technology and the other for students of humanities. According to these syllabi, the goal of English teaching for non – English majors was to develop relatively high reading capability of the students, so as to allow them to get the information associated with their majors and to use English as a tool as well as to lay a sound foundation for their own English learning practice in the future. In 1987, CET – 4 and CET – 6 were implemented with the aim of pushing forward English teaching in universities (Cheng, 2008).

### 1. 1. 5 The Reform Period

In the beginning of the 1990s, with the deepening of the Economic Reform and Opening – up Policy, international exchange between China and the outside world has evolved from simple scientific and technological cooperation to an all – around exchange that involves science, economy and culture. In order to adapt to such a socio – political change, the Ministry of Education held a historic meeting in July, 1997 in Da Qing city. Right in that particular meeting, the slogan of “pushing China’s English teaching a great step forward” was put forward, which laid the foundation for an all – around reform in English teaching (Adamson, 2004). Since then, the focus of English teaching in China has changed from the development of reading ability to that of the five skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. University English teachers started to develop a new teaching concept, which is in the process of English teaching, when providing students with basic language knowledge, English teachers should



also guide their students to make use of their linguistic knowledge to practice extensive reading and communication activities. Therefore, the aim of English teaching is not only to improve the foreign language literacy of the students, but also to enhance their cultural accomplishment and personal growth as well.

### 1.1.6 English Learning Craze in China

From the 1990s onwards, there has been an increasing awareness of the importance of English learning among Chinese people. Parents are especially supportive of their children learning English as they firmly believe that English knowledge may guarantee their children a brighter future; When companies recruit new staff, one of the top requirements is always the certificate of CET - 4 or CET - 6, or TOEFL above 500 points, IELTS above 6 points (Liu & Yu, 2008). When a college or university teacher wants to become a professor or an associate professor, he or she will be first required to pass an English proficiency test specified by their institutes. It seems that English has become a golden key to higher salaries and more successful lives. It is reported that by 2008, English learning population in China reached 300 million, accounting for one - fourth of the country's total population. Among them, more than 100 million are students, from primary school to university. It is predicted that the English learning population in China will surpass the population whose mother tongue is English in 2009 (Liu & Yu, 2008). A survey indicates that 56 percent of non - English major students spend a large portion of time on English learning and another 19 percent spend almost all of their time on English (Liu & Yu, 2008).

Along with the English learning boom, English has become a "big business" in China (Wang, 2001). Good examples of this include the New Oriental Schools and Li Yang's Crazy English programs. It is reported that by the end of August of 2009, the net income of the New Oriental School has reached 118.8 million US dollars in the first quarter. Since its establishment in Beijing in November 16, 1993, the New Oriental School has set up 32 schools, 115 learning centers, and 15 bookstores in 31 cities across China. There are altogether 4 million students enrolled in the New Oriental Schools by the end of 2006.

What is worthy of mentioning about Li Yang's Crazy English program is that Li