Educational Challenges in Underdeveloped Regions of China: A Microscopic Analysis of Current EFL Writing Pedagogies in a Chinese Normal College

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ABSTRACT

This research is aimed at exploring unsustainable development in education in China's underdeveloped regions from the micro perspective of the current state of EFL writing pedagogies in a Normal College in North-eastern China (namely Manchuria). It studies the current state of the teaching of EFL writing from the methodological, practice, and achievement aspects (students' test performance). This paper also examined the existence of educational unsustainable development in this representative university in Manchuria from the micro perspective of the teaching of EFL writing. To fulfil the research objectives, quantitative analysis approaches were employed through an eight-question questionnaire. A total of 626 valid responses were collected with a response rate of 95.28%. Results indicated that unsustainable development in education does exists in this university in terms of EFL writing pedagogies covering both theoretical and practical aspects. The below-average teacher competence in this underdeveloped area and the educational inequality in terms of human resources were among the responses collected. The educational inequity and inequality in terms of educational environment and educational climate were also pointed out. Minimal and insignificant achievement of teaching was also evidenced in students' low performance in CET4 Writing and Translation. Recommendations for further research were given.

Keywords: Teaching of EFL writing; college English writing pedagogy; educational inequity; educational unsustainable development; normal college.

INTRODUCTION

Considered as a country hosting the world's largest assemblage of EFL learners (Gu, Janurary 2010; Luxin, 2015), China runs College English as compulsory courses in all universities regardless of students' major subjects, focusing on five aspects in its EFL education — listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating —under the Guidelines on College English Teaching made by The National Foreign Languages Teaching Advisory Board under the Ministry of Education (2020). However, the focus on each aspect is different. In College English, writing has been given less emphasis than other aspects since the last version of the guidelines published in 2016 and somehow was not revised in the latest version published in 2020 (Lianzhen, 2020; Shouren, 2016). It may be one of the reasons that many of China's EFL learners are poor at writing in English although they have been studying English for over ten years since their primary school to undergraduate level or even graduate level (Luxin, 2015).

This situation has been highlighted by many other studies as well, as it is shown in students' performance on College English Test (CET), the college-level national EFL test in China which includes two levels: CET4 and CET6. Jinlan and Yi'an (2012) indicated that there is a significant increase on students' average scores of Listening and Reading in CET4 and CET6, but the scores of Writing and Translation part are hardly improved (Lee, 2018). In addition, China's low average writing scores of IELTS (Academic Test) also reflects this grave situation, which is a subpar display: only 5.76 in 2019 (British Council, 2021; Muller & Han, 2022). As an EFL student from China who has learnt English for over 10 years, one of the authors has also experienced of all the four aspects, there is indeed a comparative neglect in the teaching of writing in English language in China.

Not surprisingly, China's researchers and educators started to pay more attention to this situation, and are trying to bring in traditional or current Western writing pedagogies into China's education. As it was shown in the study of Banban and Haixiao (2019), who used CiteSpace II to present a knowledge mapping of these years' Chinese researches on the English for Academic Purposes from Chinese Social Science Citation Index (CSSCI) database. It shows that the major research areas and the domestic leading edge of studies have gradually changed towards academic writing and the teaching of academic reading.

Compared to students in the developed regions, those students in developing countries may have to endure the educational inequity and inequality. This precisely represents an unsustainable educational development that contravenes with the goals set out in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) which aims at "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2015).

The authors therefore, are of the view that the current state and the present climate of the teaching of EFL writing/college English writing at these places is still bleak thus the educational unsustainable development exists there meanwhile. To confirm these issues, we did an empirical survey in Manchuria with the permission and help from one of the top managements of a normal college (henceforth University A) — an undistinguished, common, public university in Manchuria (not in the C9 League, the Project 985, the Double First-Class University Plan, nor the Project 211). The Normal University refers to a group of universities in China and some other countries like France, focusing on the education and preparation of both elementary and secondary educators, known as a Teacher Training University. We believe that the double identities, "students-for-now" and "teachers-to-be", of our samples increases the significance of

this study hence made this study more relevant. Accordingly, this research pursues two objectives:

1. To explore the current state of University A in the teaching of EFL writing from the methodological, practice, and achievement aspects (students' test performance).

2. To examine if the educational unsustainable development exists in this representative university (in Manchuria) from the micro perspective of the teaching of EFL writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The educational unsustainable development widely exists in China's different levels of education and in various perspectives. On the early childhood education level, Hong et al. (2020b) did a survey to explore the parental satisfaction with early childhood education service in rural China, which pointed out the inequity, inequality, and the lack of social justice in this field. They also indicated in another research that personalities of various circles should devote efforts to promote equity, equality, and social justice even in urban China (Hong et al., 2020a).

Yang et al. (2018) pointed out the educational inequality widely exists in the compulsory nine-year education system (primary and middle school) within China's rural areas in terms of human and technological resources and examined the effectiveness of promoting education equity by using computer-supported collaborative teaching models. The profound lack of access in students' education quality and teachers' professional development opportunities within rural areas were highlighted in this research. (Lu et al., 2022) sketched out the spatial pattern of education resources at primary and middle schools in Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle, illustrating the existing educational inequality. As the results show, the agglomeration degree and equilibrium of educational resources are of obvious differences in some micro aspects among different areas in this economic circle although its allocation of resources is relatively balanced.

On the tertiary education level, the study of Luo et al. (2018) penetrated the inequality of affording low socio-economic status students' opportunities to enter distinguished Chinese universities despite China's expansion of higher education. The educational unsustainability development has also been found in the distance higher education by Li et al. (2022) using the provincial data from 2008 to 2018. Xu et al. (2022) revealed the inequality of educational facilities, especially the higher educational facilities, between urban and rural areas. Geng and Zhao (2020) examined 31 Chinese provincial regions' sustainable higher education development by using the 6E (**E**conomy, **E**ffectiveness, **E**fficiency, **E**quity, **E**arnings, and **E**quality) evaluation index system they constructed and the TOPSIS method based on the information entropy weight. They found that there is a lack of the comprehensive degrees of sustainable higher education development in most of those regions whereas the situation is better in the developed areas including coastal regions and the central-south China regions.

Ma et al. (2022) examined the educational sustainable development in the perspective of postgraduate geographical talents education. The strong inter-regional differentiation and imbalance are found and the general east-west geographical pattern in China is pointed out. Liu (2021) explored the educational equity in university preparatory classes at School of Minzu (民族 in Chinese, ethnic group) to access a closer view on education from the perspective of ethnic minority students. This research identified the educational inequity in terms of rural-urban born students and various ethnic minority.

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLES

This study used survey sampling to select members from the target population to be the sample for this research. Regardless of the respondent's age, gender, ethnic group, academic level (undergraduate or postgraduate), and university majors, any students in University A who have attended CET4 for at least one time are eligible to respond to the questionnaires. As a result, we collected a total of 657 responses, including 626 valid responses (response rate=95.28%).

INSTRUMENT

This study employed quantitative analysis approach to examine the potential existence of educational unsustainable development from the perspective of the current state of EFL writing/college English writing pedagogies in University A. It covers all three aspects which are (1) the teaching methods and approaches, (2) the practice of teaching, (3) and the achievement of teaching i.e the students' test performance. The researchers sent the anonymous and confidential questionnaires constructed with eight questions via Wenjuanxing (问卷星 in Chinese), a widely used online survey platform in China to University A.

Within the ambit of our questionnaires, a total of eight questions have been meticulously devised to elicit multifaceted insights from the respondents. Question 1 is to garner respondents' evaluative scores pertaining to the CET4 Writing and Translation part. Question 2 is to gain a better understanding of the students' individual viewpoints on English writing. Question 3 and 6 were designed to ascertain the methodologies employed by the respondents when approaching writing in English. Question 4 and 5 were created to gauge the efficacy of teachers' pedagogical strategies and approaches in English writing. Question 7 was introduced in an effort to shed light on the subjective challenges faced by the respondents when it comes to writing in English. Lastly, Question 8 is aimed at gathering respondents' valuable insights on the effectiveness of English writing courses, considering their unique subjective viewpoints.

Notably, when designing Questions 7 and 8, the authors drew inspiration from the illuminating questionnaires formulated by Mo (2012) and Huiping and Yan (2006). Question 7 (**How many types of difficulties you are facing while writing in English?**) was set with six options — *A*. *I have a very limited vocabulary*, *B*. *My English grammar is very poor*, *C*. *I don't know how to start or what contents it should involve*, *D*. *I'm not good at dealing with different genres of writings*, *E*. *The differences in cultural identities make writing or even understanding topics difficult*", and *F*. *Others*. Meanwhile, Question 8 (**Currently in your English writing class, what do you think the obstacles in the teaching are?**) was set with six options as well: *A*. *My lack of interest*, *B*. *Inefficient teaching methods/approaches*, *C*. *The periods of English writing courses are not enough*, *D*. *Lack of places at where we can practically write in English outside the classroom*, *E*. *The university and the educators haven't attached enough importance to English writing, and *F*. *Others*. For these two questions, students could select one or more answer choices.

The data collected were analysed through IBM SPSS Statistics 26.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

After receiving the questionnaire, participants were told that their details are considered as confidential and responses are to be kept as anonymous. They were further briefed that the study was designed to explore whether educational unsustainable development exists in their university, in this case, from the perspective of the current state of University A's pedagogies in College English writing courses. A set of informed consent was obtained. Participants generally completed the questionnaire within 10 minutes. The questionnaire link's access period was set for seven days.

RESULTS

RESPONDENTS' BASIC INFORMATION

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of respondents' age and scores of CET4 Writing and Translation part

	N	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*
Age	*626*	*18*	*26*	*21.97*	*2.633*
CET4 Writing and Translation scores	*626*	*71*	*168*	*116.29*	*15.010*

Table 2

Frequency and percentage by respondents' gender

	Frequency	*Percent*	*Valid Percent*
Male	*291*	*46.49%*	*46.49%*
Female	*335*	*53.51%*	*53.51%*
Total	*626*	*100.00%*	*100.00%*

As shown in Table 1 and Table 2, there are 46.49% males (N=291) and 53.51% females (N=335). The minimum age is 18 and the maximum age is 26 with the average age is (21.97 ± 2.63). As China's students normally enter their primary school at the age of six to seven (Lin & Li, 2020) and there are five-calendar-year undergraduate programs. Our respondents range from Year 1 undergraduate to Year 3 (final year) of postgraduate level (Master's degree), crossing all the lifetime from Bachelor's and Master's degree, making our samples more expansive and reflective in the aspects of age and academic year.

The minimum score of CET4 Writing and Translation is 71 with the maximum is 168, and the average score is (116.29 ± 15.01). According to the explanation of CET4's scores published by National Education Examinations Authority (National Education Examinations Authority, 2022), it indicates that the score of 71 obtained by the respondents is in the lowest band; the score of 168 means surpassing 86%-90% entrants; whereas the average score of 116.29 means surpassing about only 5%-7% entrants. This indicates that the overall performance of the respondents is unsatisfactory, although there are some students who achieved relatively satisfactory scores.

CET4 scores were generally divided into five bands namely *Dreadful* (scores of 70-89), *Awful* (scores of 90-109), *Bad* (scores of 110-129), *Normal* (130-149), and *Good* (scores of 150-169).

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 2 TO QUESTION 6

Table 3

Frequency and percentage by responses to Question 2 to Question 6

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
		Question 2	
Hard	536	85.62%	85.62%
Normal	80	12.78%	12.78%
Easy/I can handle it.	10	1.60%	1.60%
Total	626	100.00%	100.00%
		Question 3	
Yes, always.	461	73.64%	73.64%
Yes, occasionally	140	22.36%	22.36%
No, barely/never.	25	3.99%	3.99%
Total	626	100.00%	100.00%
		Question 4	
Yes, always.	0	0.00%	0.00%
Yes, occasionally	153	24.44%	24.44%
No, barely/never.	473	75.56%	75.56%
Total	626	100.00%	100.00%
		Question 5	
Yes, always.	0	0.00%	0.00%
Yes, occasionally	93	14.86%	14.86%
No, barely/never.	533	85.14%	85.14%
Total	626	100.00%	100.00%
		Question 6	
Almost 0 minutes.	88	14.06%	14.06%
Under 30 minutes.	306	48.88%	48.88%
30 minutes to 1 hour.	193	30.83%	30.83%
Over 1 hour.	39	6.23%	6.23%
Total	626	100.00%	100.00%

As projected in Table 3, in responses to Question 2 (Do you feel it is hard to write in English?), 85.62% of the students (N=536) felt it is hard to write in English, which is an extremely large quantity, 12.78% of the students (N=80) felt it is of a normal difficulty to write in English whereas only 1.60% of the students (N=10) felt it is easy to write in English and they can handle it. Such a huge quantity of the students who regard English writing as their desperate trouble exactly mirrors above-mentioned scientists' and educators' statement that even though those students have been studying English for at least 10 years, they are still not good at writing in English. Meanwhile, it also proved that the achievement of the college English writing is execrable.

One of the challenges experienced by English learners' in writing in English is that they always think in their mother tongue instead of English itself, for there is a serious discrepancy between Chinese and English thought patterns, which is one of so-called mother tongue interferences that have been indicated by many scientists impacting language learning negatively, especially written and spoken English (Kumaran & Krish, 2021; Mohammad & Hasbi, 2021; Nogueroles & Ruiz-Cecilia, 2022; Oyewole, 2017; Ren & Wang, 2014; Youn-hwa, 2019). In the responses to Question 3 (Do you start English writing in Chinese first, then translate them into English?), 73.64% of our respondents (N=461) are always writing in Chinese first then only translating into English, thinking in their mother tongue while doing English writing tasks. 22.36% of the students (N=140) do so occasionally and only 3.99% of the students (N=25) barely or never do so, they just think in English while using English. The students are

afraid to think in English because of their poor competence of English, which will make them improve their English proficiency at a slow rate. They are locked in this vicious cycle. On the other hand, they massively underestimate not only writing but also translating, which requires a high level of competency in both original and target language, and that is one of the reasons why there are so many pidgin usages that exist.

As early as 2006, Huiping and Yan (2006) have indicated that it is a great movement in China's English writing class that the class gradually changed from taking analysing vocabulary and grammar as the principal thing into a platform for exploration and interaction. They found this movement from two questions they designed in their questionnaire which is used in this study as Question 4 (Have your teachers asked students to analyse the merits/the virtues of model essays in class?) and Question 5 (Have your teachers asked students to analyse the errors/the failings in model essays in class?). These two related questions can reflect the extent of interaction between teachers and students in English writing class. The results are showed as Table 3, that there are no teachers in university A (NQ4, Q5=0) always ask students to analyse the merits/virtues nor errors/failings in model essays in English writing class. Most of the teachers (NQ4=473, 75.56%; NQ5=533, 85.14%) barely or never ask students to do so in class. This shows that there is almost no interaction between teachers and students in English writing class at this university. The class in this university becomes a stage where the students sit and rehearse what they were taught, which is an extraordinarily inadvisable and inefficient teaching method in any academic field.

The learning periods for English writing class are limited, whether the students have devoted enough extracurricular time into the knowledge they gained is often considered as the standard of measuring a "competent student" in China. In Question 6 (How much time do you spend on writing in English/practicing English writing per week?), we asked the time they spend on writing in English or practicing English writing every week. The two similar activities — writing in English and practicing English writing — have different motivations. When one says one is practicing English writing, it means one consciously practice the writing skills we learned, such as doing a summary practicing or a paraphrasing practicing. However, when one says one just write in English, it means one could not only practice the writing or writing skills, but also just simply write something in English, like texting in English to others via social media or write a letter to our English-speaking friends. Whatever the motivations are, they all can help improve the respondents' English writing competency. Among the samples, 14.06% (N=88) respondents spent almost no time on English writing, but 86.94% (N=538) spent time on it including 39 (6.23% of total) students have spent over 1 hour time per week. This seems like a considerable rate, but is there really a statistical relationship between the students' English writing score and the time they spend on English writing as many people believe? A series of statistical analyses in the next part was conducted to explore this hypothesis.

THE STATISTICAL CORRELATION BETWEEN STUDENTS' SCORE AND THE TIME THEY SPEND ON ENGLISH WRITING

Table 4

Pearson correlation coefficient between students' score and the time they spend on English writing

		Students' score
The time students spend	Pearson Correlation	.816**

on English writing	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	626

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the linear relationship between students' score of CET4 Writing and Translation part and the time they have spent on English writing. As shown in Table 4, there is a positive correlation between the two variables, r(624)=0.816, p=0.000. Therefore, it could be construed as that at least in University A, the more time the students spend on English writing, the higher the scores they will likely achieve.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 7 AND QUESTION 8

We made two contingency tables (Table 7, 8) whose variables are the responses to these two questions and students' scores bands, to try to figure not only the frequency and percentage of these responses but also the deeper meaning between them and their statistical relationship with their scores.

THE STATISTICAL CORRELATION BETWEEN STUDENTS' SCORE AND THEIR RESPONSES TO QUESTION 7

Table 7

Frequency and percentage by responses to Question 7 and its correlation with students' scores

		Score Bands					Total
		Dreadful	Awful	Bad	Normal	Good	
Option A	Count	18	146	389	55	13	621
	% within Option A	2.90%	23.51%	62.64%	8.86%	2.09%	
	% within Score Bands	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	81.25%	
	% of total	2.88%	23.40%	62.34%	8.81%	2.08%	99.52%
Option B	Count	18	146	376	42	2	584
	% within Option B	3.08%	25.00%	64.38%	7.19%	.34%	
	% within Score Bands	100.00%	100.00%	96.66%	76.36%	12.50%	
	% of total	2.88%	23.40%	60.26%	6.73%	0.32%	93.59%
Option C	Count	18	132	183	0	0	333
	% within Option C	5.41%	39.64%	54.95%	0.00%	0.00%	
	% within Score Bands	100.00%	90.41%	47.04%	0.00%	0.00%	
	% of total	2.88%	21.15%	29.33%	0.00%	0.00%	53.37%
Option D	Count	18	146	322	2	0	488
	% within Option D	3.69%	29.92%	65.98%	0.41%	0.00%	
	% within Score Bands	100.00%	100.00%	82.78%	3.64%	0.00%	
	% of total	2.88%	23.40%	51.60%	0.32%	0.00%	78.21%
Option E	Count	18	146	370	45	13	592
	% within Option E	3.04%	24.66%	62.50%	7.60%	2.20%	
	% within Score Bands	100.00%	100.00%	95.12%	81.82%	81.25%	
	% of total	2.88%	23.40%	59.29%	7.21%	2.08%	94.87%
Option F	Count	0	0	3	1	7	11
	% within Option F	0.00%	0.00%	27.27%	9.09%	63.64%	
	% within Score Bands	0.00%	0.00%	0.77%	1.82%	43.75%	
	% of total	0.00%	0.00%	0.48%	0.16%	1.12%	1.76%
Total	Count	18	146	389	55	16	624
	% of total	2.88%	23.40%	62.34%	8.81%	2.56%	100.00%

Note: Percentages and totals are based on respondents.

As Table 7 indicates, there are 99.52% students (N=621) who confessed to their limited vocabulary that restrict their English writing and 93.59% students (N=584) stated that their poor

English grammar have a negative impact on their English writing. Within the scores bands, all students in the Dreadful, Awful, Bad, and Normal band (N=608) stated that they have a small vocabulary size, 81.25% of those students (N=13) in the rest band, the Good band, admitted their vocabularies are limited; all students in the Dreadful and Awful band (N=164) and almost all students in the Bad band (N=376, 96.66% within the score band) indicated their English grammar is very poor, 76.32% of the Normal band's students (N=42) said that they are also not good at grammar, but only 12.50% of the students in the Good band (N=2) considered the English grammar as their weakness. This shows that the profound lack of vocabulary is widely found in almost all students in this university and the weakness of English grammar is only absent sometimes in those students with good competence in English writing.

It was also found that the students who selected Option C of Question 7 are all in the Dreadful, Awful, and Bad band (N=333, 100% within Option C, 53.37% of total samples) and there is an extremely high response rate in the Dreadful band (N=18, 100.00% within the score band) and the Awful band (N=132, 90.41% within the score band), which means the students whose scores are under the normal standard, especially whose scores are really bad, have no idea how to start writing in English or what content the writing should be. This option is extraneous to how many and how deep the English writing skills the students master, but has a strong relationship with the writing itself. The students claimed that they could not start to write or do not know what content they should write in a writing task even in their mother tongue. We could assume that these students are poor at writing in Chinese language as well.

Genre-based instruction is often mentioned by scientists and educators that is one of the foremost pedagogies in the second language (henceforth L2) writing (Byrnes, 2014; Heron & Corradini, 2020; Li & Zhang, 2022; Lin et al., 2020; Mauludin, 2020; Nazari & Alizadeh Oghyanous, 2022; Traga Philippakos, 2020; Uzun & Zehir Topkaya, 2020; Xiang et al., 2022; Yu, 2021). Even though in terms of "teaching to the test", many genres will be examined in CET4 Writing and Translation part under The Guideline of National College English Test Level 4 and 6 (The Commitee of National College English Test Level 4 and 6, 2016). As presented in Table 7, there are 78.21% of the samples (N=488) who could not handle different genres of writings. Beyond doubt, this is an inexcusable neglect in both teaching side and learning side.

Another common and profound difficulty in English writing or even L2 writing is the difference in cultural identities. Many scientists have argued that learning a language is a "process of identity construction" (Block, 2007; Ha, 2007; Miller, 1999; Miller, 2007; Norton, 2006; Norton & Gao, 2008). The number of respondents who experience trouble with this issue is staggeringly up to 592 (94.87%). To enhance this situation, not only does the English class should put more attention to foreign culture, but also any possible places.

Furthermore, there were 11 students (1.76%) who found that, there are some other difficulties they have faced but were not included in the given options. These difficulties should be placed into highlight so actions could be carried out by the educators since nearly half of the good band students chose this option, as sometimes the smart students could provide us surprisingly constructive views.

THE STATISTICAL CORRELATION BETWEEN STUDENTS' SCORE AND THEIR RESPONSES TO QUESTION 8

As stated in Table 8, 546 students (87.64%) said they have lack of interest in English writing. This it is one of the challenges in teaching and learning of English writing. However, all students in the Good band (N=0, 0.00%) have no issue. This is another vicious cycle— the less interest

they maintain, the less motivation they have and the much less motivation they have which in the end leads to the much less interest they maintain.

The Options B, C, D, and E are a series of feedback which students gave to the English writing class, their teachers, their university, and even the educational environment in their hometown which indicated the educational inequity and equality in terms of educational environment, educational climate, and educational human resources. Among the samples, over a half of them (N=394, 63.24%) claimed that their teachers' pedagogies are inefficient which give rise to students' bad performance; 557 students (89.41%) selected Option C, which means most of the students think that there should be more periods of English writing courses; almost all students (N=612, 98.23%) complained of the lack of opportunity at where they could really use English writing; and 95.51% students (N=595) hold the view that the university and the educators have not attached enough importance to English writing. This is related to the fact reported previously that the national policy about College English teaching has paid insufficient attention to English writing during the past years. Although it already became the leading edge of research on English teaching and writing in China nowadays as noted earlier, so far this stampede has not come to the economically and educationally undeveloped area, Manchuria, especially to those "undistinguished" universities here.

Option F of Question 7 presented those 14 students (2.25%) who found other challenges in the practice of teaching of English writing in their class deserve enough awareness.

There is another thought-provoking fact about the feedback that only in the Good band, there are many students (60.00%) who did not think the challenges in their English writing class are due to the inefficient teaching methods/approaches and the insufficient periods of English writing courses. The amount is even higher in their responses to Option E ("The University and the educators have not placed enough emphasis to English writing"), it shows that there are up to 73.33% students in this band who did not select it. Are there really almost no such situations in their university? Since the response rate of these three options is extremely high, these situations could have possibly exist. The logical reason why the students with good performance in the test ignore or have not realize those situations; could be that universities are not the only way they acquire knowledge, even not the most significant. They have various ways to gain, improve, and broaden their knowledge, which lead them to achieve good performance though the above-mentioned situations exist. Thus, they have not been keenly aware of their existence, or they think that they still can do English writings well although there are such situations in their university.

Table 8

Frequency and percentage by responses to Question 8 and its correlation with students' scores

		Score Bands					Total
		Dreadful	**Awful**	**Bad**	**Normal**	**Good**	
Option A	Count	16	137	366	27	0	546
	% within Option A	2.93%	25.09%	67.03%	4.95%	0.00%	
	% within Score Bands	88.89%	93.84%	94.09%	49.09%	0.00%	
	% of total	2.57%	21.99%	58.75%	4.33%	0.00%	87.64%
Option B	Count	15	119	230	24	6	394
	% within Option B	3.81%	30.20%	58.38%	6.09%	1.52%	
	% within Score Bands	83.33%	81.51%	59.13%	43.64%	40.00%	
	% of total	2.41%	19.10%	36.92%	3.85%	0.96%	63.24%
Option C	Count	17	133	358	43	6	557
	% within Option C	3.05%	23.88%	64.27%	7.72%	1.08%	
	% within Score Bands	94.44%	91.10%	92.03%	78.18%	40.00%	

	% of total	2.73%	21.35%	57.46%	6.90%	0.96%	89.41%
Option D	Count	18	146	386	51	11	612
	% within Option D	3.05%	23.88%	64.27%	7.72%	1.08%	
	% within Score Bands	100.00%	100.00%	99.23%	92.73%	73.33%	
	% of total	2.89%	23.43%	61.96%	8.19%	1.77%	98.23%
Option E	Count	17	139	385	50	4	595
	% within Option E	2.86%	23.36%	64.71%	8.40%	0.67%	
	% within Score Bands	94.44%	95.21%	98.97%	90.91%	26.67%	
	% of total	2.73%	22.31%	61.80%	8.03%	0.64%	95.51%
Option F	Count	0	0	6	5	3	14
	% within Option F	0.00%	0.00%	42.86%	35.71%	21.43%	
	% within Score Bands	0.00%	0.00%	1.54%	9.09%	20.00%	
	% of total	0.00%	0.00%	0.96%	0.80%	0.48%	2.25%
Total	Count	18	146	389	55	15	623
	% of total	2.89%	23.43%	62.44%	8.83%	2.41%	100.00%

Note: Percentages and totals are based on respondents.

DISCUSSION

As Ai (2015) indicated, EFL writing is not a process solely on memorising words and putting them together under some grammar rules, but rather a process which needs to develop EFL learners' competence to yield new texts. Thus, students could not effectively improve their writing skills without competent educators or pedagogies, educational equity and equality are therefore of a profound importance and significance.

Not ruling out there are few students who ascribed their bad performance to the teaching side, but there might be a possibility that the pedagogies are inefficient and outdated, due to the high response rate to this complain and the fact that all these students in such a teacher-training college know what excellent pedagogies are, since they all have various compulsory courses about the practice of teaching and the study of teaching. Admittedly, as the findings of Geng and Zhao (2020); Li et al. (2022); Li and Xue (2022); (Luo et al., 2018); Mo (2012); Xu et al. (2022) indicate, circumstances are much better at those distinguished universities in Manchuria, but the Guidelines on College English Teaching is aimed at all college students at all universities in China, and the amount of the non-distinguished universities is always above the amount of the distinguished universities in any country around the world, which is exactly the significance and the value of educational sustainable development. Meanwhile, those undistinguished universities and their students from economically or educationally undeveloped areas who should have the opportunity to enjoy full equality similar to others are suffering cruel injustice.

The inefficient pedagogies and the attendant student's poor performance also led to the vicious circle between students' interest and performance of English writing. For those students who performed badly, they always need to spend a long time to come up with ideas, to draft, and to revise, but receive a low grade after these hard work to which, in return, made them feel dejected and become unwilling to devote the same efforts in their next writing tasks. Moreover, the inadequate setting in where they could practically use English writing is making things worse, henceforth escalates this situation. This is precisely the meaning of existence of the educational sustainable development in terms of the educational environment and climate.

However, this is not solely the fault of the teachers but also the neglect from the national education system, namely the educational unsustainable development compared with the developed areas in China. As it was emphasised in the interview of Mo (2012) with 49 college

teachers from five universities, including one normal college, in another economically and educationally undeveloped area of Guang Xi Province in China:

> *Some teachers really want to do something more to help the students in writing, but they lack experience in teaching writing and feel puzzled about right techniques and the proper ways to help the students… They use their own teaching methods based on their learning experience.*

Mo also indicated that the complaint from many college English teachers about their demanding teaching tasks and administrative affairs, which occupied them and made them have no time to concentrate on the foremost thing they ought to do which is considering the proper pedagogies to improve students' writing competence. Some interviewed teachers have been paying rapt attention to the lexical and grammatical correction of students' texts instead of the process of writing itself. Besides, they have to make the content of English writing a low priority, putting it at the end of each College English course and spend only several minutes to devote more time to other aspects of College English because of its low priority in the Guidelines on College English Teaching.

Furthermore, the worse situation is that, this serious issue happened in these normal colleges. We could never imagine how many generations will be negatively impacted by the teachers' inefficient pedagogies when teaching teachers-to-be in teachers-training colleges. The educational government institutions, the universities, the scientists, and the educators must give heed to this critical issue.

On the other hand, the attention to the different thinking patterns between Chinese and English, namely the cultural cognitive difference, should be attracted as well, as there is such a large number of students plagued with it. Among various obstacles caused by cultural cognitive difference, the different rhetorical conventions are one type of the biggest vexations. Many studies have reported the rhetorical difficulties influence L2 writing adversely and become an enormous obstacle (Arsyad et al., 2021; Karimian Shirejini & Derakhshan, 2020). To address this issue, the educators should expand their effort in not only the English writing class but also, as mentioned previously, in any possible environment, and run English cultural cognitive courses specifically if necessary.

Then speaking from the learning side, as the current state in those economically or educationally undeveloped regions cannot fundamentally change during one or two months, students currently should realise that the class at the university is not the only way from where knowledge can be acquired, they should find some better ways to improve their written English instead of moping and giving up. For instance, to buy some classic textbooks about this field and study by themselves or even better, there are plenty of free online courses on the internet that we can easily find, many of which are made by distinguished educators and institutions. This is a good way for improving ourselves not only in English writing, not even only in college knowledge, but also in almost any aspects in our life.

CONCLUSION

The educational unsustainable development exists in this university in various aspects from the micro perspective of the current stage of EFL writing/college English writing. From the aspect of teaching methods and approaches, the pedagogies and the non-interactive teaching mode

employed by the college English writing teachers in University A proved to be awful, inefficient, and unscientific, which shows the low teacher quality in this undeveloped area and the educational inequality in terms of educational human resources. From the aspect of the practice of teaching, students are appealing for more periods of college English writing courses, more opportunities at where they could apply English writing, and more attention and importance attached to English writing from their university and teachers, which indicated the educational inequity and inequality in terms of educational environment and educational climate. The low and insignificant achievement of teaching was also evidenced in students' bad performance on CET4 Writing and Translation part and the fact that almost all students have been plagued by the difficulty of English writing.

Fortunately, students at University A are willing to devote their extracurricular time into English writing which shows their subjective agency, and Pearson correlation coefficient shows the positive correlation between students' score and the time they spend on English writing. Not only them, but all students in economically or educationally undeveloped areas require the educational equity and equality, and an educational sustainable development environment urgently. Further research could consider exploring these issues from the teachers and college managers side using a systematic evaluation.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

Question 1

Your score of the latest CET4 *Writing and Translation* part you have attended is _____.

Question 2

Do you feel it is hard to write in English?

(You can select only one answer choice.)

    A. Hard.

    B. Normal.

    C. Easy / I can handle it

Question 3

Do you start English writing in Chinese first, then translate them into English?

(You can select only one answer choice.)

    A. Yes, always.

    B. Yes, occasionally.

    C. No, barely/never.

Question 4

Have your teachers asked students to analyse the merits/the virtues of model essays in class?

(You can select only one answer choice.)

    A. Yes, always.

    B. Yes, occasionally.

    C. No, barely/never.

Question 5

Have your teachers asked students to analyse the errors/the failings in model essays in class?

(You can select only one answer choice.)

    A. Yes, always.

    B. Yes, occasionally.

    C. No, barely/never.

Question 6

How much time do you spend on writing in English/practicing English writing per week?

(You can select only one answer choice.)

    A. Almost 0 minutes.

    B. Under 30 minutes.

    C. 30 minutes to 1 hour.

    D. Over 1 hour.

Question 7

How many types of difficulties you are facing while writing in English?

(You can select one or more answer choices.)

    A. I have a very limited vocabulary.

    B. My English grammar is very poor.

    C. I don't know how to start or what contents it should involve.

    D. I'm not good at dealing with different genres of writings.

    E. The different cultural identities make writing or even understanding topics difficult.

    F. Others.

Question 8

Currently in your English writing class, what do you think the obstacles in the process of teaching and learning are?
(You can select one or more answer choices.)

    A. My lack of interest.
    B. Inefficient teaching methods/approaches.
    C. The periods of English writing courses are not enough.
    D. Lack of places at where we can practically write in English outside the classroom.
    E. The university and the educators haven't attached enough importance to English writing.
    F. Others.