



## Core Literacy Deficiency in High School Chinese Education——Insights from Student-Formulated Essay Titles

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the issues in high school students' self-formulated essay titles in the context of Chinese language education. A total of 1046 Chinese language comprehensive examination papers were randomly selected from City K, with 42 blank papers excluded, resulting in a valid sample of 1004. The research found that 22.01% of the self-proposed essay titles had various issues, including unclear meaning, scribbles, typos, grammatical errors, and punctuation errors. Interviews with 10 senior Chinese language teachers revealed that these issues reflect the current state of Chinese language teaching, which neglects basic knowledge and the cultivation of learning behaviors. This study aims to identify the underlying causes of these issues and propose practical strategies to improve the quality of Chinese language education.

**Keywords:** Core Literacy, Essay Titles, Language Education, Teaching Strategies

### Introduction

Core literacy in high school Chinese language education is essential for students' lifelong development and their adaptation to societal needs. It encompasses competencies such as language construction and use, thinking development and enhancement, aesthetic appreciation and creation, and cultural inheritance and understanding [1]. These are not only foundational to Chinese language teaching but also serve as key indicators for evaluating teaching effectiveness and student capability. The quality of self-formulated essay titles reflects students' mastery of core literacy and provides insight into the current state of Chinese writing instruction. This study seeks to analyze issues in student-generated essay titles, exploring their root causes and proposing actionable solutions.

The significance of essay titles has long been emphasized in writing pedagogy and composition research. Most prior studies stem from the hands-on experience of frontline educators. Many researchers have focused on the importance and appeal of titles. For instance, Wang highlights how an engaging title captures the grader's attention and influences composition scores [2]. Liu argues that titles serve as a window into a student's personality, cultural literacy, and creativity [3]. Zheng emphasizes that scoring standards place substantial weight on titles [4]. Jiao outlines essential qualities of strong titles, including accuracy, conciseness, novelty, imagery, and elegance [5]. Zhang Hua stresses that titles must align closely with essay content, revealing a writer's deep understanding of the materials [6].

Additionally, several studies explore title-crafting techniques and common pitfalls. Dou identifies typical issues such as disconnection between title and content, overly broad scope, and use of clichés, offering practical solutions [7]. A Lei discusses rhetorical strategies, thematic expansion, and creative approaches [8]. Zhang Rui provides specific guidance for candidates to generate effective titles in exam scenarios [9].

In terms of methodology, most literature adopts theoretical analysis, such as the works by Si [10] and Shi [11]. Comparative analyses of student samples are also evident, with Tang identifying key quality determinants in titles [12]. From a rhetorical angle, Qing Niao explores how stylistic choices enhance expressiveness and appeal [13].

While this body of research is valuable, it remains largely focused on title-crafting skills. There is limited investigation into what self-created titles reveal about student thinking and systemic issues in Chinese writing education. Therefore, this study aims to address that gap by examining student-generated essay titles from a more diagnostic and pedagogical perspective.

To achieve the research objectives, we attempt to find answers to the following questions:

1. What problems exist in the essay titles proposed by high school students in City K?
2. What is the proportion of errors made by high school students in the essay titles in the overall?
3. Is there a difference in the errors made by males and females in the essay titles?
4. What problems in high school Chinese language teaching are reflected by the errors made by students in the essay titles?
5. What suggestions do high school teachers propose to solve these problems based on the research results?

### Theoretical Framework

Table 1: Core Literacy Competencies in High School Chinese Language Education



Core Literacy Aspect			Simplified Description
1.Language Construction and Use			Students build proficiency in Chinese through practice, learning its rules and characteristics, and gain the ability to communicate effectively in various contexts.
2.Thinking	Development	and Enhancement	The focus is on enhancing cognitive skills such as intuition, imagination, logic, and creativity through language use.
3.Aesthetic Creation	Appreciation	and	Students develop aesthetic sensibilities and the skills to express and create beauty through aesthetic experiences and evaluations.
4.Cultural Understanding	Inheritance	and	There's an emphasis on preserving and promoting Chinese cultural heritage, understanding diverse cultures, and fostering cultural confidence and appreciation.

## Research Methodology

### Research Design:

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the issues and provides robust data support and reliable conclusions.

### Population and Sampling:

The study randomly selected 1046 Chinese language comprehensive examination papers from grade 12 students in City K. After excluding 42 blank papers, a valid sample of 1004 was obtained. Additionally, 10 senior high school Chinese language teachers were interviewed to gather their insights and opinions.

### Research Tools:

The October 2024 senior high school Chinese monthly examination answer sheets were used to collect data on essay titles. An "Interview Plan" was developed to guide the semi-structured interviews with teachers.

### Validity and Reliability:

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, two Chinese language teachers categorized the errors in essay titles. The Kappa coefficient for the categorization was 0.737, indicating good consistency. For the interview text coding, the Kappa coefficient was 0.765, also indicating good consistency.

### Data Collection Process:

Electronic scanned versions of the examination papers were downloaded from the "Seven Days Online Grading Platform." The interviews with teachers were recorded and transcribed using "Cloud Cat Transcoding" online software.

### Data Analysis:

Microcloud software was used to categorize the 1004 essay titles by error type. SPSSAU was used for descriptive statistics, interval estimation, and independence tests on the relevant data. The interview texts were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes and insights.

## Findings

**Table2: Statistics of Normal and Abnormal Titles**

Serial No.	Title Type	Frequency	Percentage
1	Normal Title	783	77.99%
2	Abnormal Title	221	22.01%

**Table3: Proportion of Abnormal Titles**

Serial No.	Title Type	Frequency	Percentage
1	Unclear Meaning	73	7.27%
2	Scribbles	56	5.58%
3	Typos	25	2.49%
4	Grammatical Errors	24	2.39%
5	Punctuation Errors	22	2.19%
6	Not Centered	6	0.60%
7	No Title	5	0.50%
8	Negative Energy	4	0.40%
9	Word Reversal	2	0.20%
10	Too Long or Too Short	2	0.20%
11	Common Sense Errors	2	0.20%

**Table4: Interval Estimation for Overall Proportions**

Type	Normal Title	Abnormal Title
Amount	783	221
Percentage	77.99%	22.01%
Standard Error (SE)	0.01	0.01
Confidence Interval (CI)	0.75 - 0.81	0.19 - 0.25

**Table5: Independence Test:**

Item	Type	Gender (%)	Total	$\chi^2$	p
Female	Normal	398 (85.96)	783 (77.99)	31.819	0.000**
Male	Normal	385 (71.16)	783 (77.99)	31.819	0.000**
Female	Abnormal	65 (14.04)	221 (22.01)	31.819	0.000**
Male	Abnormal	156 (28.84)	221 (22.01)	31.819	0.000**

**Interview Findings**

**Current State of Language Teaching:**

Interviews with senior Chinese language teachers revealed several key issues in the current state of language teaching:

1. **Lack of Emphasis on Basic Knowledge:** Teachers acknowledged that there is a significant lack of focus on basic knowledge training and the cultivation of good learning behaviors and habits among students.
2. **Overemphasis on Reading:** The current teaching approach places too much emphasis on reading comprehension while neglecting other foundational skills such as grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
3. **Monotonous Teaching Methods:** Many teachers admitted that their teaching methods are monotonous, leading to a lack of student interest and engagement.
4. **Neglect of Individual Needs:** There is a general neglect of the individual needs of students who struggle with language skills .
5. **Influence of Gaokao:** The college entrance examination (Gaokao) heavily influences the teaching content, often at the expense of a more balanced and comprehensive language education.
6. **Incomplete Implementation of Core Literacy:** The core literacy framework has not been fully implemented in the curriculum, resulting in gaps in students' comprehensive language abilities.
7. **Lack of Practical Opportunities:** Students have limited opportunities to practice and apply their language skills in real-world contexts.

**Expert Recommendations:**

Teachers provided several recommendations to address these issues:

1. **Strengthen Basic Knowledge Training:** Emphasize the importance of basic skills such as grammar, spelling, and punctuation in the classroom **Balance Skill Development:** Ensure that reading comprehension is balanced with other language skills to provide a comprehensive education.
2. **Innovate Teaching Methods:** Use engaging and creative teaching methods, such as project-based learning and interactive activities, to stimulate student interest.
3. **Personalized Support:** Pay attention to individual differences and provide personalized support for students who struggle with language skills
4. **Reduce Gaokao Influence:** Adjust the content of the Gaokao to include a broader range of language skills and reduce its influence on daily teaching practices.
5. **Implement Core Literacy Education:** Fully implement the core literacy framework to cultivate students' comprehensive language abilities.
6. **Increase Practical Opportunities:** Provide more opportunities for students to practice their language skills through activities such as writing workshops and debate competitions.

**Gender Differences in Language Learning:**

Interviews also highlighted gender differences in language learning:

1. **Boys vs. Girls:** Boys were found to have more issues with self-formulated titles than girls, which may reflect gender differences in language learning (Liu, 2024).
2. **Individual Focus:** Education should focus on the individuality and needs of each student rather than generalizing by gender.
3. **Confidence and Motivation:** Boys may lack confidence in writing, while girls tend to be more confident and motivated.
4. **Balanced Teaching:** Teaching should pay attention to balancing the needs of both boys and girls to ensure equitable development.
5. **Teacher Reflection:** Teachers should reflect on their own teaching practices to address the specific needs of boys in language learning.

6. **Cultural Influence:** Societal gender stereotypes may contribute to girls being more confident and motivated in language learning.

### **Suggestions for Balancing Gender Differences:**

1. **Study Habits:** Encourage boys to develop better study habits and pay more attention to detail.
2. **Practical Activities:** Encourage boys to participate in more practical activities to enhance their language skills.
3. **Cooperative Learning:** Promote cooperative learning between boys and girls to foster mutual learning and support.
4. **Building Confidence:** Help boys build self-confidence in their language abilities.
5. **Individual Differences:** Pay more attention to the individual differences between boys and girls to tailor teaching strategies accordingly.

### **Discussion**

This study set out to explore a specific but revealing issue in Chinese language education: the difficulties senior high school students in K City face when independently creating composition titles. These difficulties, while seemingly minor, reflect deeper structural challenges in the educational system. The National New Curriculum Standard College Entrance Examination Composition Scoring Standards penalize errors such as missing titles, incorrect characters, and poor punctuation—issues that directly contradict the stated emphasis on foundational writing skills in the College Entrance Examination Evaluation System and the broader goal of fostering core literacy in high school Chinese education [14].

Our findings confirm a persistent gap between curricular objectives and actual student outcomes. Despite formal instruction in writing, 19% to 25% of surveyed students submitted titles containing clear errors. This high incidence of mistakes suggests that students struggle with even the most basic aspects of written expression, which should have been mastered by the high school level. The problem is not limited to titles alone—errors like illegible writing and character misuse indicate a broader deficiency in writing competence, consistent with Ren’s findings on full composition performance [15].

Qualitative insights from teacher interviews reinforce these observations. Educators pointed to several underlying issues: insufficient training in Chinese writing fundamentals, uneven development of language skills, uninspiring pedagogy, neglect of differentiated instruction, and limited opportunities for practical writing practice. These factors collectively hinder students from developing the core literacy competencies that the curriculum aspires to achieve.

One notable pattern observed in the data is the gender disparity in title-writing performance. Male students were significantly more likely to commit title-related errors than their female counterparts. This aligns with earlier research by Kutuk [16] and Li and McLellan [17], which highlights how gender stereotypes shape student attitudes toward language learning. These studies suggest that boys often perceive language learning as a feminine domain, leading to reduced engagement and lower self-efficacy. Such psychological factors may contribute to the observed performance gap. Additionally, findings by Hwang et al. [18] and Liu [19] show that tailored interventions, such as mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), can help increase motivation and enjoyment, particularly for boys.

By linking these findings with existing literature, the study fills an important gap: while previous research has addressed general composition challenges, the specific issue of title creation has received little attention. Our analysis shows that even this narrow skill—often overlooked in both instruction and assessment—can reveal systemic educational shortcomings and meaningful performance disparities among students.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the quality of self-formulated essay titles by senior high school students in City K as a lens through which to evaluate the implementation of core literacy in Chinese language education. The results reveal that while the majority of students produce acceptable titles, a significant proportion of 22.01% demonstrate notable deficiencies such as unclear meaning, typos, grammatical and punctuation errors, and even scribbles. These surface-level mistakes point to deeper, systemic issues in teaching practices, including insufficient emphasis on basic language skills, overreliance on reading instruction, and a lack of individualized support. The study identifies a clear gender disparity: male students are significantly more prone to title-related errors than female students. This finding supports previous research suggesting that gender stereotypes and differences in language learning motivation and self-efficacy contribute to uneven performance. Interviews with teachers also confirm that the current curriculum has yet to fully realize the goals of core literacy—particularly in fostering language use, creative thinking, and aesthetic expression.

This study bridges a critical research gap by highlighting how something as specific as title-writing can expose broader weaknesses in language instruction. It underscores the need for comprehensive reform that includes strengthening foundational training, promoting differentiated instruction, and fully integrating core literacy principles into classroom practice. Addressing these challenges is essential not only for improving students’ academic performance but also for cultivating the communicative, cultural, and critical thinking skills necessary for their future development.

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