



Main Problems and Countermeasures in Writing English Major Papers

Rongrong Xu

Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, Jiangxi, 330022, China

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: 20 October 2020

Revised: 22 October 2020

Accepted: 24 October 2020

Published Online: 31 October 2020

Keywords:

English majors

Academic writing

Major problem

Countermeasures

ABSTRACT

According to the Degree Regulations of the People's Republic of China, our country implements a three-level Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degree system, graduates at all levels must pass the course examination and thesis defense before they can obtain a degree certificate. It can be seen that writing academic papers is a very important skill. For English majors, academic papers need to be written in English to illustrate their academic achievements. However, judging from the current papers of English majors, there are prominent problems in thesis writing, such as: blind selection of topics, empty content, scattered research, and improper attitudes of students. This study mainly adopts the literature method, on the basis of reading academic writing-related literature and English majors' paper, the author finds out the commonalities of English major students' academic writing and puts forward effective countermeasures. This study will provide new strategy for English majors to improve their thesis writing ability, avoid making general mistakes, and to a certain extent, reduce the tutoring pressure for essay instructors, so as to improve the academic writing quality of English majors.

1. Introduction

Academic papers are an inspection of the comprehensive qualities of English majors' professional knowledge, writing ability, innovative thinking, as well as their scientific research competence, language organization, and ability to solve academic questions independently. Writing academic papers is a process of mutual processing of thinking and language. With the development of information technology, human wisdom has enabled the continuous step of society as a whole. Any idea, inspiration, question, phenomenon or knowledge can only be retrained and conveyed in precise language. In 1999, in order to solve economic and employment problems, China expanded the number of enrolled students in Col-

leges and Universities, resulting in a certain decline in the quality of students. The English Major was once a popular choice for Senior High school graduates, which attracted a large number of students. In recent years, there have been many academic frauds, leading the focus of public to academic writings again, the Ministry of Education is highly concerned that more stringent measures will be taken to review academic papers.

In the late 1990s and early 20th century, the academic writing research of English major attracted academic the attention of academic circles. Zak Lancaster (2016) compared stance expression in HG and LG papers in two undergraduate courses, stance is expressed via self-mentions, hedges, attitude, and disclaim markers, HG papers projected greater contractiveness, critical distance, and

**Corresponding Author:*

Rongrong Xu,

Yaohu Campus, Jiangxi Normal University, No.99 Ziyang Street, Changdong Town, Nanchang County, Nanchang City, Jiangxi Province, China;

E-mail: 861932539@qq.com.

discoursed alignment^[1]. Jianping Xie(2020) outlines main strands of research according to the analytic framework, and sorts out major methodological approaches in academic English writing, identifies four strands, the stance, the met discourse, the appraisal and the voice^[2]. Through empirical research, This thesis discusses the main problems in the writing of academic papers of English majors, discusses the sources and solutions of these problems, so as to provide ideas and methods for English majors.

2. An Overview of Academic Writing of the English Majors

First of all, it's necessary to find out what academic paper is, and what the difference between academic papers and compositions is. Papers are the main form of publication of scientific research by researchers, the researchers here can be teachers or students, and anyone can be called a researcher, has the right to write and publish papers. The quality and quantity of papers are important indicators of a researcher's academic level. The purpose of composition is to express, and the purpose of thesis is to elaborate, the former belongs to literary texts, and the latter belongs to practical texts. The composition has strong subjective emotional color, and the writing methods are also diverse. The thesis is a branch of composition, a complete manifestation of the process of scientific experiments and logical analysis of experimental results, the discussion of scientific issues, a tool for academic exchanges, and the embodiment of academic achievements. Papers must be innovative, including the topic, the method, and the conclusion. The paper should be scientific as well as standardized, of which structure generally consists seven parts: title, abstract, introduction, central body, conclusion, acknowledgements and references. The structure of the paper should be organized in a logical way, sentences vary, are not too long, nor too short.

Chinese English majors enter the first stage of English learning from the primary school, and enter the highest and final stage of English learning which is called academic paper writing. It's uneasy for English majors to write papers even in their mother tongue—Chinese, which requires them to actively respond, consolidate their basic foreign language skills, and take elective academic guidance courses to lay the foundation for course papers and graduation papers.

3. The Main Problems of Academic Writing for English Majors

Professional English paper writing cannot be accomplished overnight. There are a series of steps from topic

selection to draft, mistakes are hard to be avoided and vary from person to person. This study enumerates the main problems of English majors in writing, mainly from three dimensions of paper writing, English professional knowledge, and students' personal behaviors.

While EAL (English as an additional language) scholars across the world are increasingly under pressure to publish internationally, many are confronted with serious language barriers during the process^[3]. Paper writing is the biggest difficulty faced by both English majors and non-English majors, and it is also the most prominent problem of the poor quality essays. On the basis of reading a lot of literature and researches, I found that students have serious deficiencies in the aspects of topic selection, literature review and academic standards when writing papers. A good paper attaches great importance to engagement and academic behavioral skills, in detail, engagement is positively related to students' academic performance, and academic behavioral skills predict students' academic performance^[4]. The views held by researchers are the central idea and the soul of the whole paper. The establishment of a clear academic viewpoint is the most important part of the paper. Many students cannot explain their points reasonably, or directly borrow others' points and put them into own paper. It is a vital precondition for academic paper to draw out a good topic, which should strive to be correct, to be novel, to have grounds. There is an old saying, a good beginning could be half way success, and the same is true of academic papers. English majors lack professional consideration when choosing titles, and the title they choose are often too wide in scope, too difficult in research, and outdated in content, which increases the difficulty of writing. Students should first brainstorm, think about whether the topic is worth studying, then collect data, read literature, understand the research status, and finally narrow the scope of the topic, prepare the title, the title should not big, old, difficult. Follow clear principles of topic selection, so that the development of the thesis has a goal and depth. Selecting a topic is the first step of the thesis, only if the first step is done steadily, the follow-up work will proceed smoothly.

3.1 Literature Review

Many students don't know how to write the research review, or they just simply list the previous viewpoints. Different from the main body, the basic elements of the research review should include the research background, research status, evaluation of the current research and references. Literature review is an indispensable chapter in a paper. The successful completion of literature review means that researchers have a clear understanding of the

main theories and current progress in this research field. Then, the task of researcher is to develop new research perspectives on the basis of previous achievements. However, English majors are prone to the following situations:

(1) Extensive list of previous views and articles; (2) Unable to form their own opinions; (3) Give up critical research and avoid conflicts; (4) choose literature subjectively without considering research disputes. Literature review is also regular and feasible. The Chinese students prefer to stand neutrally when making reference to other voices^[5]. Researchers should learn to summarize by themselves, find out the deficiencies of the current research status, and learn to critically and dialectically treat the research problems, clear up own research ideas.

3.2 Academic Norms

Academic norms refer to the principles to be followed in the research and involved in the whole process of academic study. I would like to focus on the two aspects of paper structure and format, both of which are common problems for English majors in paper writing. First of all, many students are incomplete in terms of format, such as lack of abstract or preface, and lack of necessary chapters because they don't understand the functions of each structure in the paper. In addition, loose structure, unclear organization, illogical argument and monotonous argument methods are also factors that cause the quality of the paper to be poor. Secondly, some problems in the format of the paper are easy to be ignored by students, resulting in not standard paper, so that they can't successfully submit. For example, the format errors include the chart part, such as the setting of caption and cross-reference, English input and number, many students always set English as Chinese font. Norm mistakes are objective, which are easy to be avoided. To master the correct academic norms, students need to carefully study excellent journal papers, and often seek advice from tutors if they don't understand.

3.3 English Professional Knowledge

Chinese college English majors take TEM-4 and TEM-8 exams in their Grade 2 and Grade 4, does this mean that the English knowledge level of Chinese College English majors has reached a high level? In fact, that's not the case, Tem-4 and TEM-8 are undergraduate teaching examinations designed to test the syllabus for undergraduate English majors, and the quality of academic writing is not determined by the exam level. Both English undergraduates and English postgraduates still have a lot of shortcomings in English professional field. For example, they do not have a good understanding of western culture,

and it's difficult to conduct in-depth research on papers with culture as topic. The sentence is not smooth, with low readability, which falls far short of the standard of academic papers. The end of foreign language teaching is to cultivate the learners' comprehensive language application ability, and the test of language learning from low to high is listening, speaking, reading and writing, fluency in textual presentation is the ultimate goal of foreign language learning. The high frequency of English basic errors can be attributed to the fact that student's having not mastered the fundamental knowledge and the other is that academic research is not rigorous enough.

4. Writing Strategies for English Majors

The types of language skills differ in nature-productive (speaking and writing) and receptive (listening and reading)^[6]. English academic writing course is one of the most important key curricular for English majors. It is offered in the third year of the university at undergraduate level and in the second year at graduate level. Both courses are offered after a certain period in the university, so that students can have a better understanding of their major and research direction. It's suggested that academic writing courses in colleges and universities should be set up as compulsory courses for majors in each department, instead of being taught in the way of public courses, teaching students in accordance with their aptitude should be carried out, and the reform of academic writing courses should be unique in teaching content. Teachers in the foreign language school know the difficulties in academic writing of students in the foreign language school, and teachers in the music school know the problems that often occur in paper writing of students in the music school.

The teacher's role is to help students improve their academic writing and acquire academic writing skills, but most teachers don't realize that they take on more responsibility in helping students improve their essay writing skills. The responsibility here is not to say that the teacher takes over the writing of the paper, but to take some measures to improve students' ability. Teachers need to encourage students, not just criticize, improve the enthusiasm of students' research, and provide effective feedback on students' strengths and weakness during their writing.

The professional knowledge level of English majors is divided into knowledge aspects and competence aspects. In terms of knowledge requirements, students should master English language knowledge, English literature knowledge, English country knowledge, be familiar with Chinese language and culture, and understand relevant professional knowledge and basic knowledge of humanities, social sciences and natural sciences, and form

interdisciplinary knowledge structure. In terms of ability, students should have English pragmatic ability, English literature appreciation ability, cross-cultural communication ability, critical thinking ability, research ability, independent learning ability and practical ability. To improve the level of English majors, we must continue study, keep pace with the times, and participate in social practice.

5. Conclusion

This study finds that English majors have many problems in academic paper writing, including paper writing, professional knowledge level and subjective shortcomings of students. In terms of paper writing, students' topic selection is not innovative and clear enough. Literature review simply fills in previous research results but lacks of critical spirit. They do not pay attention to academic norms and write arbitrarily. English majors are generally deficient in professional knowledge and ability, and their attitude towards academic research is not optimistic. Based on this phenomenon, I give three suggestions to improve the academic writing level of English majors from the perspectives of school curriculum setting, teacher guidance and students' subjective initiative. This study provides a new method for English major students to improve their essay writing ability, improve the academic writing quality of English major students in China, and opens up a new perspective for future academic research of English major students.

References

- [1] Zak Lancaster. 2016. Expressing stance in undergraduate writing: Discipline-specific and general qualities [J]. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* (23): 16-30.
- [2] Jianping Xie. 2020. A review of research on authorial evaluation in English academic writing: A methodological perspective [J]. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* (47): 100895.
- [3] Na Luo, Ken Hyland, 2019. "I won't publish in Chinese now": Publishing, translation and the non-English speaking academic [J]. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* (39): 37-47.
- [4] Fazilat Siddiq, Perman Gochyyev, Ona Valls, 2020. The role of engagement and academic behavioral skills on young students' academic performance—A validation across four countries [J]. *Studies in Educational Evaluation* (66): 100880.
- [5] Jianping Xie. 2016. Direct or indirect? Critical or uncritical? Evaluation in Chinese English-major MA thesis literature reviews [J]. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* (23): 1-15.
- [6] A.V. Ivanova, L.A. Altasova, M.B. Sidorova, 2020. Assessment and Development of Communicative Skills in English: A Case Study of 1st Year Undergraduate Students Learning English As Their Major [J]. *Special number: Educational Psychology Practices in Europe and the Middle East* (8): SPE(2),630.