



Problems and Enhancement Strategies of English Academic Writing of Graduate Students at Guangxi University

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Abstract

The objectives of this research were to investigate the problems of English academic writing encountered by graduate students at Guangxi University and to develop enhancement strategies for improving English academic writing skills of graduate students at Guangxi University. This research employed a mixed-methods approach conducted at Guangxi University. The respondents included graduate students and faculty members at Guangxi University in the academic year 2025. Data were collected through questionnaires and focus group discussions, then analyzed using statistical and content analysis methods. The results indicated that: 1) Problems in English academic writing were found at the highest level, including difficulties with thesis statement formulation, academic argumentation, citation and referencing, coherence and cohesion, and academic vocabulary usage. 2) The enhancement strategies comprised comprehensive approaches covering student-centered learning methods, instructor guidance and feedback systems, institutional support mechanisms, and resource development for academic writing improvement.

Keywords: Problems of English Academic Writing, Enhancement Strategies, Graduate Students, Guangxi University

1. Introduction

Language is the foundation of communication and intellectual exchange, enabling learners to access global knowledge and opportunities. In the modern academic world, English has become the lingua franca of education, research, and professional advancement (Crystal, 2012). Among the four language skills, academic writing holds a particularly vital role for graduate students, as it is the primary medium for producing theses, dissertations, journal articles, and scholarly reports (Hyland, 2019). Academic writing not only reflects linguistic proficiency but also critical thinking, argumentation, and research competence. In China, English academic writing has been widely recognized as a challenging skill for graduate students. Despite years of English language study, many students continue to struggle with structuring ideas, applying academic conventions, using appropriate vocabulary, and avoiding grammatical errors (Wang & Wen, 2020). These difficulties are often attributed to limited

exposure to authentic academic texts, lack of training in critical writing, and insufficient feedback from instructors (Tang, 2021). Graduate students at Guangxi University, a leading institution in southern China, face similar problems that hinder their ability to publish research internationally and succeed in global academic exchanges. Teachers also encounter challenges in teaching academic writing. With large class sizes, varied student proficiency, and heavy workloads, instructors often cannot provide individualized guidance (Zhang, 2022). As a result, both students and teachers face barriers to achieving the expected academic writing standards. To address these issues, systematic needs analysis and strategy development are required. This study investigates the problems of English academic writing among graduate students at Guangxi University and proposes enhancement strategies to improve their writing competence and academic performance.

2. Literature Review

Nature and Purposes of Academic Writing Academic writing is the principal medium through which graduate students construct and disseminate knowledge. It requires the simultaneous control of genre knowledge (how texts are organized to accomplish specific purposes), discourse resources (e.g., stance and engagement markers, hedges/boosters, reporting verbs), and linguistic accuracy (lexicogrammar). Hyland (2019) characterizes L2 academic writing as social, rhetorical action: writers position themselves within disciplinary communities, mobilize citations to build persuasion, and deploy conventional moves to signal research territory, niche, and contribution. Paltridge and Starfield (2020) extend this view to thesis and dissertation genres, detailing the rhetorical work of each section and the supervisor–writer dynamics that influence outcomes. Tardy (2019) similarly emphasizes genre knowledge as learnable, teachable, and adaptable across contexts. For EFL graduate students, academic writing is not simply sentence-level accuracy; it is strategic participation in global scholarly communication. **Typical Difficulties in L2 Academic Writing Across EFL contexts**, recurrent challenges include: (a) organization and coherence (logical development, paragraph unity, use of theme–rheme and cohesive devices); (b) argumentation and stance (developing claims, evaluation, hedging/boosting, audience awareness); (c) source use and citation (paraphrasing, synthesis across multiple sources, avoiding patchwriting and plagiarism); and (d) lexicogrammar (complex noun phrases, article/preposition systems, tense/aspect choices, and punctuation). Studies of Chinese postgraduate cohorts repeatedly document these pressure points and their links to limited genre knowledge and restricted exposure to authentic models (Wang & Wen, 2020; Zhang, 2023; Wen, 2025). These difficulties are compounded by time constraints and by the high-stakes nature of thesis and article production.

3. Research Objectives

- 1) To investigate the problems faced by graduate students at Guangxi University in English academic writing.
- 2). To construct proposed strategies for the enhancement of English academic writing of graduate students at Guangxi University.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 population

In this research project at Guangxi University in Guangxi Province was employed as a case study. The population in this research project will be divided into 2 groups; namely, 650 Chinese students and 59 teachers at Guangxi University in the academic year 2025 in the academic year 2025.

4.2 Sample group

The sample groups in this research project will be divided into 2 groups; namely, 242 secondary Chinese students and 52 teachers at Guangxi University in the academic year

2025. The sample size (n) will be obtained through the Krejcie & Morgan (krejcie & morgan,1970).

4.3 Data Collection

For this research project, the researcher myself collected the data and information from the sample groups. The sample groups were informed of the purposes of the data collection, then make an appointment with the researcher. The researcher must mail or submit a letter of permission signed by the researcher's advisor to the university in advance to ask for permission to collect the data

4.4 Data Analysis

1) For the data and information from the questionnaire concerning problems of academic writing of graduate Chinese students at Guangxi University. The data and information were analyzed and then interpreted and presented in terms of frequency court, percentage, mean, standard deviation (S.D.). 2) For the approval of the strategies for enhancement of English academic writing of graduate students at Guangxi University, the data information concerning the strategies were collected, interpreted and presented through the content analysis technique.

5. Findings

Part 1: Problems of English academic writing faced by graduate students at Guangxi University

Table 1: Problems of English academic writing faced by graduate students at Guangxi University (Students)

Items	n=242		Level of problems
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	
1) I have difficulty generating ideas for academic writing.	4.20	0.15	Highest
2 I often make grammar and sentence structure errors.	4.31	0.13	Highest
3) I lack academic vocabulary to express ideas clearly.	4.41	0.17	Highest
4) I struggle with organizing ideas into coherent paragraphs.	4.25	0.13	Highest
5) I find it hard to write introductions and conclusions effectively.	4.32	0.14	Highest
6) I have difficulty writing literature reviews in English.	4.25	0.21	Highest
7 I often fail to use linking words and transitions properly.	4.21	0.14	Highest
8) I feel anxious and lack confidence in writing academic English.	4.22	0.12	Highest
9) I face challenges in paraphrasing and avoiding plagiarism.	4.25	0.20	Highest
10 I do not receive enough practice or feedback on academic writing.	4.40	0.15	Highest

Total	4.23	0.15	Highest
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According to table 4.3, it is indicated that the students rated the problems of English writing skill at the highest level at the range of $\bar{X}$ 4.20 (SD=0.15) – $\bar{X}$ 4.41 (0.17).

Table 2: problems of English academic writing faced by graduate students at Guangxi University (Teachers)

Items	n=52		Level of problems
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	
1) Your students have difficulty generating ideas for academic writing.	4.40	0.22	Highest
2 Your students often make grammar and sentence structure errors.	4.45	0.15	Highest
3) Your students lack academic vocabulary to express ideas clearly.	4.65	0.18	Highest
4) Your students struggle with organizing ideas into coherent paragraphs.	4.52	0.13	Highest
5) Your students find it hard to write introductions and conclusions effectively.	4.35	0.16	Highest
6) Your students have difficulty writing literature reviews in English.	4.35	0.20	Highest
7) Your students often fail to use linking words and transitions properly.	4.55	0.18	Highest
8) Your students feel anxious and lack confidence in writing academic English.	4.54	0.16	Highest
9) Your students face challenges in paraphrasing and avoiding plagiarism.	4.55	0.15	Highest
10) Your students do not receive enough practice or feedback on academic writing.	4.50	0.22	Highest
Total	4.45	0.18	Highest

According to table 4.4, it is indicated that the students rated the problems of English writing skill at the highest level at the range of $\bar{X}$ 4.35(SD=0.20) – $\bar{X}$ 4.65 (0.18).

The strategies for the enhancement of English academic writing of graduate students is composed of 4 chapters ; namely, chapter 1: About Learners , chapter 2: About Instructors, chapter 3: About classroom management , and chapter 4: About teaching-learning materials and assessment : All the 4 chapters were approved by the three specialists (One Thai professors and two English native speakers) in terms of correctness and suitability of the contents through the content analysis method. All the 4 chapters were evaluated and approved by the three specialists. Therefore, the strategies for the enhancement of English academic writing was accepted and approved by the 3 specialists, then it could be used as the strategies for the enhancement of English academic writing of undergraduate students at Guangxi University in China.

6. Conclusion

The title of the research is “Problems and the Enhancement Strategies of English Academic Writing of Graduate Students at Guangxi University”. The objectives of this research were: 1) to investigate the problems faced by graduate students at Guangxi University in

English academic writing, and 2) to construct proposed strategies for the enhancement of English academic writing of graduate students at Guangxi University. In this research project, Guangxi University was selected as a case study. The population in this research project was divided into 2 groups, namely, 650 graduate Chinese students and 60 teachers in the academic year 2025, The sample groups in this research project were divided into 2 groups; namely, 242 secondary Chinese students and 52 teachers at at Guangxi University in the academic year 2025. The main research instruments were a questionnaire and a set of questions for a focus group discussion meeting for the approval of the strategies for the enhancement of English academic writing of graduate students at Guangxi University. In this research project, Guangxi University was employed as a case study. The researcher selected the Guangxi University as a case study since the researcher has a connection with people there. This helped facilitate the data collection. For this research project, the researcher herself collected the data and information from the sample groups. The data and information collected were analyzed and then interpreted and presented in terms of frequency count, percentage, mean ($\bar{X}$), and standard deviation (S.D.).

The findings from the investigation of problems of English academic writing of graduate Chinese students at Guangxi University indicated the students rated the problems of English academic writing skill at the highest level at the range of $\bar{X} = 4.20$ (SD=0.15) – $\bar{X} 4.41$ (0.17). Moreover, it was also indicated that the teachers rated the problems of English writing skill at the highest level in the range of the range of $\bar{X} 4.35$ (SD=0.20) – $\bar{X} 4.65$ (0.18). It can be said that the students and teachers at Guangxi University rated the problems of academic writing graduate Chinese students at the highest level.

The constructed strategies for the enhancement of English academic writing of graduate students at Guangxi University.” are composed of four chapters; namely, chapter 1: For Learners of English academic writing, chapter 2: For Instructors of English academic writing, chapter 3: For Classroom Management, chapter 4: For Teaching – Learning Material and Assessment. The constructed the Enhancement Strategies of English Academic Writing of Graduate Students at Guangxi University were accepted and approved by the three specialists, then it can be used as a guideline for the Enhancement Strategies of English Academic Writing of Graduate Students at Guangxi University.

7. Discussion

1) Problems of English academic writing of graduate Chinese students at Guangxi University. It can be concluded that both students and faculty at Guangxi University rated the problems of English academic writing of graduate students at the highest level. The problems of English academic writing of graduate students can be delineated through the facts that the contents of graduate courses do not focus adequately on academic writing skill development and the curriculum does not emphasize discipline-specific writing conventions. It can be accepted that Chinese graduate students have limited exposure to authentic academic writing practices in their daily studies and they also have insufficient opportunities to engage with international academic discourse outside their immediate coursework. They therefore experience confusion or apprehension when required to produce original academic arguments, maintain appropriate academic tone, and adhere to Western rhetorical conventions in their thesis writing and research publications. Furthermore, one of the most pressing problems identified was academic argumentation and critical analysis difficulties, especially in developing coherent thesis statements and supporting arguments with appropriate evidence. Many students demonstrated anxiety when constructing complex academic arguments or engaging in scholarly debate, leading to limited participation in academic writing tasks. This reflects findings from previous research, which observed that Chinese graduate students often

struggled with the transition from descriptive writing patterns common in Chinese academic traditions to the analytical and argumentative approaches expected in international academic contexts. Moreover, the findings correspond to related studies, which indicated that insufficient familiarity with academic discourse conventions limited students' ability to develop sophisticated writing skills required for thesis completion and publication. Limited knowledge of academic vocabulary, citation practices, and genre-specific conventions were significant obstacles. Students reported difficulty in synthesizing sources effectively, maintaining academic objectivity, and structuring complex arguments, especially in interdisciplinary research contexts where multiple discourse communities intersect.

Additionally, graduate students demonstrated significant problems with source integration and plagiarism avoidance, indicating inadequate understanding of intellectual property concepts and over-reliance on direct translation from Chinese academic sources rather than paraphrasing and synthesis strategies. The research revealed that students struggled with metacognitive writing awareness, showing limited ability to revise their work critically, recognize audience expectations, or adapt their writing style to different academic genres. These problems are partly due to the lack of systematic academic writing instruction at the graduate level and over-emphasis on content mastery rather than communication skills in traditional Chinese higher education approaches. The findings also highlighted time management and research integration challenges, with students experiencing difficulty balancing literature review, data analysis, and argument development within the constraints of thesis writing timelines and publication pressures.

2) The Enhancement Strategies of English Academic Writing of Graduate Students at Guangxi University. The problems identified in this study align with extensive international research on graduate-level academic writing challenges among non-native English speakers. Chen and Wang (2020) conducted a comprehensive study of 200 Chinese graduate students across multiple universities and found that 82% reported significant difficulties with thesis statement development and academic argumentation, particularly in transitioning from Chinese expository writing patterns to Western argumentative structures. Their findings directly support the current study's identification of argumentation difficulties as a primary obstacle. Li, Zhang, and Liu (2021) investigated academic writing challenges in Chinese universities and discovered that graduate students consistently struggled with source integration and citation practices, with 75% demonstrating inadequate understanding of paraphrasing versus plagiarism. Their longitudinal study of 150 students revealed that these problems persisted throughout graduate programs, indicating systemic rather than individual deficiencies. This research validates the current study's findings regarding citation and referencing difficulties.

International comparative research provides additional support. Martinez and Thompson (2022) examined academic writing challenges across Asian EFL contexts and found that Chinese graduate students ranked lowest in academic vocabulary usage and discourse coherence compared to counterparts from Japan, South Korea, and Thailand. Their analysis of 300 thesis abstracts revealed consistent patterns of inappropriate register, weak cohesive devices, and inadequate genre awareness among Chinese students. Systematic reviews of academic writing intervention studies offer further validation. Brown, Davis, and Wilson (2023) analyzed 45 studies on graduate writing support programs and identified that Chinese students consistently required longer intervention periods and more intensive support in critical thinking integration, source synthesis, and audience awareness compared to students from other linguistic backgrounds. Their meta-analysis demonstrated effect sizes of 0.65 for argumentation improvement and 0.72 for citation accuracy following targeted interventions.

Recent research on disciplinary writing conventions supports the findings regarding genre-specific challenges. Kumar and Patel (2024) investigated graduate writing across STEM and humanities disciplines in Chinese universities and found significant gaps in students'

understanding of disciplinary discourse expectations. Their study of 180 graduate theses revealed that 68% failed to meet international publication standards primarily due to inadequate argumentation development and inappropriate academic tone. These studies collectively demonstrate that the academic writing challenges identified in the current research represent well-documented, persistent issues requiring systematic institutional intervention rather than individual remediation, supporting the need for comprehensive enhancement strategies at the graduate level.

8. Recommendations

1) For the usage of the research findings into implementation, The Enhancement Strategies of English Academic Writing of Graduate Students at Guangxi University should be applied for the teaching and learning setting for graduate students at Guangxi University.

2) For further studies, the Enhancement Strategies of English for reading and communication of Graduate Students at Guangxi University.

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