

Idea Sharing: Some Thoughts On Chinese And Malaysian Popular Writing Instructions

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Abstract:

More and more Chinese students have been studying at university campuses in Malaysia to earn their postgraduate degrees. As the largest group of international students, academic writing in English is a problem for Chinese international postgraduates at English-medium instruction (EMI) campuses overseas. When pursuing their degrees at an English Medium Instruction (EMI) campus, postgraduate students' writing ability has an important impact on their studies. Those studying writing instruction in higher education are dedicated to identifying how writing instructions influence EFL/ESL learners' academic writing ability. Still, few studies review the kinds of writing instructions with samples of EFL/ESL students earning a master's or doctoral degree (i.e., postgraduate students) especially in the context of Chinese international students studying in Malaysian higher education institutions, which is one of the most popular destinations for Chinese international postgraduate students. A review of studies on writing instructions for EFL/ESL for Chinese international students in the Malaysian context is presented in this article. The authors report of the problems in the application of writing strategies during language instruction for Chinese EFL/ESL students. The authors address the concerns regarding teaching approaches to writing and suggest ways to prevent issues in the future regarding the implementation of teaching approaches in EFL/ESL writing for international Chinese students. To help all Malaysian and Chinese educators improve the quality of writing instruction, the authors encourage educators to explore the effectiveness of genre-based approaches for teaching academic writing in their countries.

Keywords: Academic writing, EFL/ESL writing instruction, Genre-based approach, International EFL students

1.0 Introduction

The Malaysian educational system has attracted an increasing number of Chinese students seeking degrees in its higher education institutions (Nachatar Singh & Jack, 2021; Peters et al., 2021). In the current globalization and

international environment, transnational education cooperation between countries has become more widespread (Nachatar Singh & Jack, 2021; Singh, 2021). The language of instruction and learning in most Malaysian higher education institutions is English (Nachatar Singh

& Jack, 2021). English is viewed as a second language in Malaysia (Razali, 2013) as opposed to being viewed as a foreign language in China (Zhai & Razali, 2020; 2021; 2022). Although most international EFL postgraduate students have excellent English writing skills, they cannot meet the academic writing requirements of Malaysian higher education institutions (Nachatar Singh & Jack, 2021).

Additionally, this article contributes to the development of research on major writing instructions in Asia, in the context of graduate study in Malaysia. In Malaysian higher education institutions, the majority of international postgraduate students from non-native English-speaking countries (Nachatar Singh & Jack, 2021; Peters et al., 2021) are required to use English for both academic and everyday purposes (e.g., essay assignments, research proposals, and degree dissertations/theses), since the English language is the medium of scholarly communication for them. Because of this, these cohorts of EFL international postgraduate students encounter academic challenges related to academic literacy (Nachatar Singh & Jack, 2021; Peters et al., 2021). In Malaysia, research on writing instructions for international postgraduate students is limited. It is also important to understand how students' native countries (specifically, mainland China) and Malaysian higher education institutions differ in writing instructions. Furthermore, published research focusing on the writing instructions in this field is scarce (Nachatar Singh & Jack, 2021; Razali, 2013).

In this regard the authors review a number of studies on writing instructions for EFL/ESL for Chinese international students in the Malaysian context. The authors also report the problems in the application of writing strategies during language instruction for Chinese EFL/ESL students whilst they are undergoing their studies in the Malaysian higher education. The authors also address the concerns regarding teaching approaches to writing and suggest ways to prevent issues in the future regarding the implementation of teaching approaches in EFL/ESL writing for international Chinese.

In this article, the authors first explain the current English academic writing education in China, particularly the three main instructional approaches in teaching English writing in China; then the English Academic Writing Education in Malaysia; then they compare the instructional writing approaches used in tertiary education institutions between China and Malaysia; then they report on the issues in the use of writing approaches to teach English academic writing for EFL/ESL learners; and lastly the authors provide their conclusion to this issue.

English Academic Writing Education in China

In China, the primary instructional approaches for teaching Chinese tertiary-level students English academic writing are product-based, process-based, and product-oriented (POA) approaches (Wen, 2016). Chinese college English education is currently under the national syllabus and the College English Test (CET) examination system (Reynolds & Teng, 2021; Rui, 2014). In 1985, 1986, and 1999, the MOE published the College English Teaching Syllabus to create a unified college English curriculum to guide English tertiary education in China (e.g., colleges, universities, research institutes, technical universities, and community colleges) (Wang & Chen, 2021; Wang & Zhang, 2017). To help tertiary level Chinese mainland students pass the College English Test (CET), most Chinese mainland universities (e.g., public universities, private universities, research universities, technical universities, and community universities) offer “College English” courses for Chinese mainland tertiary level students (Wang & Chen, 2021; Xu & Fan, 2016; Zhou, 2017). However, “College English” courses usually use a product-based or process-based approach to help students pass the CET exams (Reynolds & Teng, 2021; Wang & Chen, 2021; Wang & Zhang, 2017). Specifically, a standard method of teaching academic writing in China is based on the product-based approach, which is because Chinese education focuses on exams and the lack of English teacher resources (Jiang et al., 2021). Nevertheless, some colleges have also adopted POA for college English writing courses (Zhang et al., 2015).

Product Approach in Teaching English Academic Writing in China

Following You (2004), teachers usually follow the teaching procedures of the product approach for teaching Chinese college students in writing pedagogy (Zhang & Zhang, 2021). This approach utilizes model texts to teach students writing in the initial phase. The product approach could help assist students in getting high scores in examinations.

There are four major stages of the Product Approach in teaching writing:

Stage one: Chinese tertiary-level students study and analyze the model texts. Chinese tertiary-level students highlight the features of the genres of the model texts.

Stage two: Controlled practice of the highlighted features is conducted in isolation.

Stage three: The process of organizing ideas in this significant stage.

Stage four: Chinese tertiary-level students independently finish writing their articles in this final stage by utilizing the writing skills, sentence structures, and vocabulary they have learned.

Specific to China, many under-developed/rural areas use traditional product-based teaching approaches (e.g., public universities, private universities, research universities, technical universities, and community universities) (Wang & Chen, 2021).

Process Approach in Teaching English Academic Writing in China

Following You (2004), teachers also follow teaching procedures of the process-based approach for teaching Chinese college students in writing pedagogy (Zhang & Zhang, 2021). Process-approach in teaching writing refers to teaching writing as multiple processes to develop and organize ideas with the production of the articles (Sun & Feng, 2009).

Furthermore, Chinese teachers often follow eight significant stages in the Process Approach Model (Steele, 2004).

Stage one: The first stage is the generation of the ideas. Students discuss and change ideas with their colleagues at this stage.

Stage two: Students write the content of discussions in notes. They assess the quality of the ideas and select valuable information for their draft.

Stage three: Students build their writing mind map by organizing their thoughts.

Stage four: Students finish writing their first drafts cooperating with their colleagues.

Stage five: Students review each others' drafts and give feedback to their colleagues.

Stage six: Students improve their drafts based on peer feedback from their colleagues.

Stage seven: Students finish writing their draft.

Stage eight: Teacher makes evaluations on students' articles and gives students feedback.

More specifically, process-based teaching methods are common in several developed/urban areas in China (e.g., public universities, private universities, research universities, technical universities, and community universities) (Wang & Chen, 2021).

Product-oriented Approach (POA) in Teaching English Academic Writing in China

Based on the disadvantages of using western-created product-based and process-based approaches for teaching writing in China, professor Qiufang Wen (Wen ; 2016) proposed a new teaching approach called the Product-oriented Approach (POA). Specifically, there are three phases to teaching with the POA: (1) motivating; (2) enabling; and (3) assessing (Wen, 2016).

Phase one: The initial phase is Motivating. There are three steps in Phase one. The first step of this phase instructs teachers to be expected to make explicit the scenarios of the tasks to be completed and how they might plausibly occur in student lives in the future. The second step in phase one is to have students complete the designated productive tasks. In the final step,

students are supposed to know what they are expected to accomplish after completing the unit (Wen ; 2016).

Phase two: 'Enabling' is the second phase of the POA. Teachers are required by this phase to follow a series of steps that will help their students' progress from being less capable to becoming more capable. There are four tasks required to be finished in this phase (Wen ; 2016) .Details are shown as follows.

- The teacher makes clear how the productive tasks will be completed, what learning objectives will be accomplished, and what enabling materials will be given or searched for.
- Assist students with enabling materials by breaking larger tasks into smaller mini-tasks.
- As the teacher gives guidance and checks their learning outcomes, students read or listen to the given materials selectively.
- Once students have finished learning the material, they practice a mini-productive task.

Phase three: As a final stage of the POA, students' language products are assessed. These might include essays, speeches, translations, role plays, posters, etc (Wen ; 2016).

There are four tasks required to be finished in this phase. Details are shown as follows.

- Students and teachers set up criteria for assessment together.
- Students submit their finished work to the teacher.
- Classroom evaluations of the typical products are carried out collaboratively between the teacher and the students.
- The remaining products are evaluated after class by the teacher and the students.

Chinese teachers of English are now exploring the possibility of using POA to teach writing courses for students at tertiary level (e.g., public universities, private universities, research universities, technical universities, community universities) (Wang & Chen, 2021). POA is still at its early stage but it is very well received by the Chinese English education field (Zhang, 2020).In order to better implement this approach in real

classes, teachers are required to follow the instructions shown above.

3.0 English Academic Writing Education in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the status of English is regarded as a significant second language (Razali, 2013). The Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) strives to develop its citizens' proficiency in the English language. English is widely used by Malaysian people as the language in business, education, and daily life in Malaysian society. Malaysian students are required to learn English language courses by the Ministry of Education Malaysia, aiming to produce talents with competent English skills to better the nation's development in diverse domains, such as economy, science, and technology (Thirusanku & Md Yunus, 2014). English is compulsory for all Malaysian school students (i.e., primary, secondary, and post-secondary education/pre-university education) (Study Malaysia.com, 2021). For tertiary level education, the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia developed an English language policy that Science and Technology courses are required to be taught in the English language for first-year undergraduate students since 1996 (Gill, 2006). Therefore, English is paid significant attention by Malaysian society. Subsequently, Malaysian students are required to take the Malaysian University Examination Test (MUET) before starting their tertiary-level education. Furthermore, Malaysian students are required to take English academic writing courses in their undergraduate studies. Furthermore, the majority of the Malaysian undergraduate program require students to write assignments in the English language. In addition, they must register degree dissertations or theses in the English language by most Malaysian higher institutions to get their undergraduate degrees or postgraduate degrees (Adi Badiozaman, 2017). Therefore, English academic writing is a significant task for Malaysian students' academic study and their further development.

Considering the significance of English academic writing for Malaysian students, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses are provided for Malaysian undergraduate students by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia.

EAP courses aim to improve Malaysian students' English academic writing performance to ensure their study quality in EMI (English as medium of instructions) at higher education institutions (Adi Badiozaman, 2017). EAP courses teach students English texts covering diverse domains, such as social, linguistic knowledge, cognitive and linguistic knowledge in various disciplines (Hyland, 2013). Students in most Malaysian higher institutions are required to take English academic writing courses to ensure their competent academic English writing skills in their academic study (Adzmi et al., 2009).

4.0 Comparison between Instructional Writing Approaches Used in Tertiary Education Institutions in China and Malaysia

Compared with Malaysia, the status of English is regarded as a significant second language (Razali, 2013), while English is considered to be a foreign language in China (Zhai & Razali, 2021). Like in China, most Malaysian teachers use a product-based or process-based approach or a combination of both to teaching English writing to (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2019). That said, particularly for tertiary-level students in Malaysia Selvaraj and Aziz (2019) reported that most Malaysian universities use process-based approaches for teaching undergraduates academic English writing. The process-based approach to writing has been incorporated into academic curricula since the 1980s (Li et al., 2019). Majority of the Malaysian undergraduate and postgraduate programs require students to write assignments in the English language. In addition, they must register degree dissertations or theses in the English language by most Malaysian higher institutions to get their undergraduate degrees or postgraduate degrees (Adi Badiozaman, 2017). At the same time, most Chinese non-English major students do not need to write their academic writing such as the theses in English (except for the abstract part). Consequently, Malaysian students have more experience writing academically in English in undergraduate education.

6.0 Issues in the Use of Writing Approaches to Teach English Academic Writing for Chinese EFL/ESL Learners

Accordingly, some aspects of product-based or process-based approaches adopted from western-teaching methods have caused some weaknesses in writing proficiency of tertiary students in China (Xu & Fan, 2016). Furthermore, numerous studies have examined the main approaches to L2 writing instruction (e.g., the product-, process-, and genre-oriented approaches) (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2013), yet the most popular ways of teaching L2 writing pedagogy are still the product and process approaches in many EFL/ESL countries (e.g., China or Malaysia) (Alan, 2022).

Considering the context of Malaysia, the authors argue that there is a lack of adequate explicit teaching instructions, such as that of the Genre-Based Approach in English academic writing. This is where the teaching of English academic writing are without the actual explicit instructions. Furthermore, there is a great need to propose teaching approaches with explicit instructions for teaching English academic writing in Malaysian higher education institutions (Joseph Jeyaraj, 2018; Mehar Singh, 2016). Therefore, the English academic writing courses using a genre-based approach in training English academic writing are scarce in Malaysian higher education institutions.

Considering the context of China, it has been reported by Wen (2016) that western-teaching approaches (e.g., product-based approach and process-based approach) in writing in China have many weaknesses (Xu & Fan, 2016), such as a lack of explicit teaching instructions, lack of basic linguistic knowledge-input, and lack of reflection activities (e.g., reflection culture is a unique culture in Chinese value) (Xu & Fan, 2016; Wang, 2021). As a result, students' writing abilities in practice are inadequate because these teaching approaches heavily focus on grammar and linguistic input but do not provide much training or actual usage of the language.

7.0 Conclusions

In regards to the issues from the use of product and product-oriented writing approach, the following issues arise from these teaching approaches too much attention to linguistic

accuracy; underestimating the writing abilities of students; an overemphasis on the product; and lacking genre knowledge which causes numerous challenges faced by Chinese tertiary-level students when doing their English academic writing practices (Wang & Zhang, 2017; Zhang & Pramoolsook, 2022).

Currently, the product-oriented Approach (POA) teaching approaches is now popularly welcome in Chinese tertiary-level writing classes to accommodate China's needs and constraints (Wen, 2016). This is an innovative pedagogy with Chinese features that address the problem of input from the output in English instruction at the tertiary level in China (Wang, 2022). Despite the POA's development in order to counter the weaknesses of the current English teaching in China, the POA is still at its infancy, and progress will depend on the results of ongoing research. Furthermore, Consequently, it is essential to investigate the effectiveness of using an approach that combines the best of product and process approaches, which is called the genre-based approach in improving international EFL (specifically international Chinese) postgraduate students' English academic writing performance in their overseas studies in the context of Malaysia. Chinese undergraduate students needed to be guided by a teaching approach with explicit instructions (e.g., genre-based approaches) to enhance their genre awareness and increase their written social-communicative competence when pursuing their postgraduate studies on the EMI campus (Zhang & Pramoolsook, 2022).

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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