

An Investigation And Study Of Thesis Writing For English Majors Of Panzhihua University: A Case Study Of The Last Three Sessions

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Abstract:

In order to examine the overall quality of undergraduate theses for English majors of Panzhihua University, the study adopts a quantitative approach, surveying 131 English majors to delve into their thesis writing experiences. The findings reflect three primary challenges encountered by students during the undergraduate thesis writing process: inadequate access to academic resources, unclear logical structuring of articles, and a detrimental writing mindset. Based on these insights, the study conduct an exhaustive analysis to delve into the underlying causes of each issue, with the aspiration of improving the quality of thesis writing among English majors at Panzhihua University.

Background: *The writing of an undergraduate thesis represents both a graduation necessity and a conclusive academic milestone. It crucially assesses students' ability to apply knowledge to solve problems. Therefore, the study embarked on an investigation to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current status of thesis writing among its English majors.*

Materials and Methods: *This study employs a quantitative method to survey 131 English majors at the university on their undergraduate thesis writing processes.*

Results: *The findings reveal that English majors face three major challenges during the thesis writing process: difficulty in accessing academic resources, lack of clarity in article logic, and a negative writing attitude.*

Conclusion: *To address the challenges faced by students in undergraduate thesis writing, the university ought to prioritize enhancing and refining its academic resource support system. Furthermore, thesis supervisors can play a pivotal role in strengthening the thesis writing curriculum by offering more intensive guidance. Lastly, students themselves should adopt proactive measures to optimize their thesis writing experience.*

Keyword: *English major, thesis writing, Panzhihua University*

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I. Introduction

Thesis writing for English majors in universities is an important stage in completing the undergraduate teaching plan and realizing the undergraduate training goals, as well as being an essential element in the cultivation of foreign language talents. It is also a key aspect used to measure and evaluate the quality of foreign language majors in universities.^[1] In addition, submission of qualified professional papers is a necessary condition for students at Panzhihua University to obtain degree certificates.^[2] However, a recent questionnaire survey

coupled with comprehensive data analysis has revealed a concerning trend: the overall quality of undergraduate theses produced by English majors at Panzhihua University has been subpar in recent years. Thus, gaining a profound understanding of the present scenario of thesis writing among English majors at Panzhihua University and subsequently addressing the identified issues holds the key to enhancing the quality of theses significantly.

II. Material And Methods

Research Question

The purpose of this study is to fully understand the current situation of English major undergraduates' thesis writing in Panzhihua University, find out their problems in the process of thesis writing, and provide some suggestions for university, advisors and students on the basis of comprehensive analysis of the causes of the problems. Then the following questions are formulated to guide the research.^[3]

1. What are the main issues in the undergraduate thesis of English majors?
2. What are the reasons for the issues?
3. How to improve the writing level of undergraduate thesis?

Research Participants

The participants in this study are English majors from Grade 2017, Grade 2018 and Grade 2019 in Panzhihua University. As the scale of each grade differs, the number of participants in each grade also varies. The distribution of participants in this study is shown in the following table.

Table 2.1 Distribution of participants

Grade	Numbers
2017	25
2018	43
2019	63
Total	131

Questionnaire

Questionnaire is more convenient to collect data, and it can ensure the authenticity of the data by one person filling out one.

The Purpose of Questionnaire

This study investigates the current situation of undergraduate design (thesis) in the eyes of English majors in Panzhihua University by questionnaire, including the implementation system of undergraduate thesis, the guidance of advisors and students' basic cognition of undergraduate thesis.^[3] Firstly, through the investigation of the implementation system, this study analyzes undergraduates' views on the current system and discusses the possibility of improving the system. Secondly, this study also analyzes the influence of advisors on students through the investigation of their guidance. Finally, by understanding students' basic cognition of thesis, this study finds out students' attitude and the difficulties encountered in the writing process.^[5]

The Design of Questionnaire

In order to understand the current situation of undergraduate thesis writing for English majors in Panzhihua University, this study compiled a questionnaire (Appendix A), which based on the reference of Lv

Hongbo and Zhao Xiaobo (2008), combined with the modification of Song Lu's questionnaire template on dissertation writing for English majors. The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part is the personal basic information of students, which consists of five questions, question 1 and 2 are gender and age, question 3 and 4 are thesis score and topic source and question 5 is about the length of time to complete the thesis. The second part is the writing situation of students, which is divided into three dimensions: University's thesis resources, thesis advisor's guidance and students' basic cognition of thesis, with a total of 15 questions. Questions 1 to 6 are aimed at understanding the requirements and curriculum arrangement of undergraduate thesis writing for English majors. Questions 7 to 9 are aimed at understanding the content and intensity of advisor's guidance, and 10 to 15 are aimed at understanding students' reflection and evaluation on thesis writing, including their attitudes and the main challenges they encountered.

Data Collection

Before the questionnaire was distributed, a pilot study was conducted. In the pilot study, the selected participants are 10 English majors who will graduate in June 2023. They are similar to those who participated in the actual investigation. After analyzing the results and adopting the suggestions put forward by the participants, a formal questionnaire was formulated. In late February, 2023, it was distributed to English majors in Panzhuhua University in grades 2017, 2018 and 2019, and 50 students were selected from each grade. All the contents of the questionnaire were provided in Chinese. Firstly, the significance of the questionnaire was introduced to the participants. Secondly, participants were asked to answer each question truthfully according to their experience and ensure that all questions were answered. At the same time, they were told that the results of the questionnaire were only used for research, and they were anonymous. All the questionnaires were collected and sorted out in detail after completion. Eventually 131 valid questionnaires were collected, 12 were missing and 7 were invalid.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire data were sorted out and statistically analyzed by Wenjuanxin. It is a website for making questionnaires and analyzing data.

University's Thesis Writing Resources

Collecting thesis writing resources is an important part of starting thesis writing. For students, the resources are mainly provided by universities, including guidance for writing theses and academic resources.

Guidance Provided by the University

According to the statistics of 131 questionnaires, there are three main forms of thesis guidance in the university besides thesis advisor: thesis guidance course, lecture and manual. The guidance contents involve topic selection, format specification, chapter structure, references, language expression and so on. The thesis guidance course is considered the most helpful form by 84 students, accounting for 64.12%. 24 students believe that the thesis guidance manual is the most helpful, accounting for 17.56%. 22 students argue that the thesis guidance lecture is the most helpful, accounting for 16.79%. Two students view that other forms of guidance are the most helpful, accounting for 1.53%, and one of them insist that the real-time guidance of the advisor is the most helpful. The most helpful form of thesis guidance was shown in the following figure:

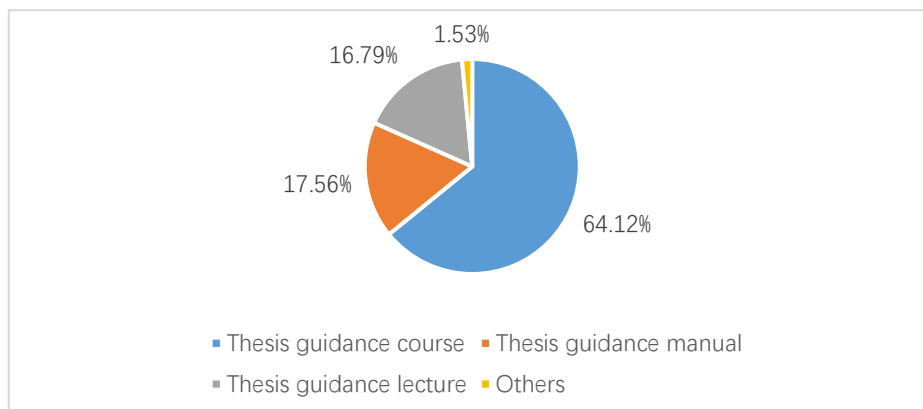


Figure 1 The most helpful form of thesis guidance

Resources Provided by the University

It’s a good way to know whether the university needs to make adjustments in providing students with writing resources by looking at the way students collect references and the difficulties encountered in writing.

As can be seen from Table 1, 54.96% of the students use the university library to collect references, and 88.55% of the students use the databases provided by the university to collect references.

Table 1 Ways of references collection

	Numbers	Percentage
Network Resources (Baidu, Zhihu, etc.)	101	77.1%
Panzhuhua University Library	72	54.96%
Panzhuhua University Database (CNKI, CQVIP, WANFANG DATA, etc.)	116	88.55%
Buy physical books, ebooks, etc.	28	21.37%
Advisors borrow physical books and ebooks, etc.	31	23.66%
Others	1	0

As can be seen from Table 2, 76.34% of students have difficulties in collecting references, 70.23% have difficulties in collecting data, 54.2% have difficulties in duplicate checking of thesis, while 52.67% of students have difficulties in paraphrasing of thesis. The first three aspects reflect that the university still needs to make adjustments in providing students with writing resources.

Table 2 Difficulties encountered by students in thesis writing

	Numbers	Percentage
Data collection	92	70.23%
References collection	100	76.34%
Duplicate checking	71	54.2%
Thesis paraphrasing	69	52.67%
Others	4	3.05%

Thesis Advisors' Guidance for Thesis

The successful completion of an undergraduate thesis is intricately linked to the guidance provided by the assigned advisor. The guidance may involve many aspects, but it may not thorough enough. The following two points are the statistics of the guidance content and supervision of advisor.

The Content of the Advisor's Guidance

As can be seen from Table 3, content of guidance involves many aspects, such as finalizing topics, reviewing outlines, checking chapter structure, correcting language problems and standardizing article formats, with an average percentage of 79.84%.

Table 3 The content of the tutor's guidance

	Numbers	Percentage
Finalize topics	110	83.97%
Review outlines	113	86.26%
Check chapter structure	113	86.26%
Correct language problems	91	69.47%
Standardize article formats	96	73.28%
Others	3	2.29%

However, as can be seen from Table 4, more than 45% of the students deem that guidance should be strengthened in the aspects of topic selection, outline, chapter structure, language expression and format specification, among which chapter structure was identified as requiring the most attention.

Table 4 Some aspects of paper guidance need to be strengthened

	Numbers	Percentage
Topic	66	50.38%
Outline	72	54.96%
Structure	93	70.99%
Expression	86	65.65%
Format	60	45.8%
Others	4	3.05%

Supervision of Thesis Advisors

According to the statistics of 131 questionnaires, 96 students perceived that their advisors provided strong supervision, accounting for 73.28%. 19.58% of the students consider that the level of supervision is moderate while 6.87% of the students think it is weak. This shows that the advisor's supervision is strong on the whole. The students' evaluation of the supervision of the advisors was shown in the following figure:

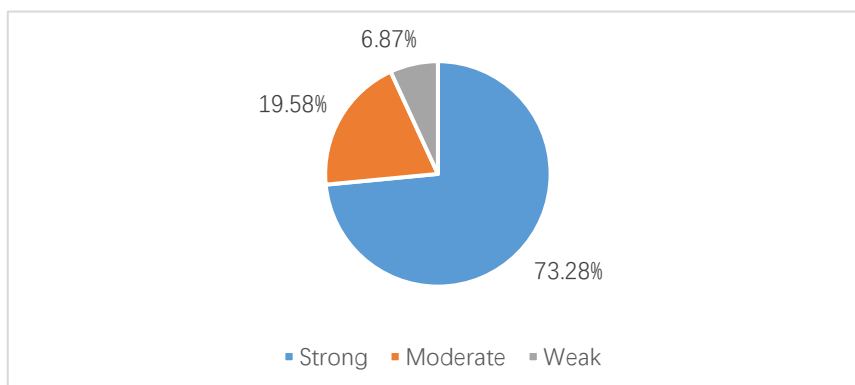


Figure 2 Supervision of Thesis Advisors

Students' Attitudes for Thesis Writing

Attitude is the core motivation that drives students' learning, and it is also one of the main factors that impact thesis writing. It is necessary to investigate students' innovation in research, as it reflects their attitude toward effective thesis writing. Additionally, understanding the difficulties and problems faced by students can lead to targeted suggestions to help them maintain a positive attitude. The following two points are statistics on students' innovation and issues.

Innovation of Undergraduate Thesis of Students

As can be seen from Table 5, 18.32% of the students' undergraduate thesis was consisted of assembled content from other people's articles, and even 2.29% were all copied. This shows that certain students hold negative or incorrect attitudes towards undergraduate thesis writing, and they do not pay adequate attention to this aspect of their academic pursuit.

Table 5 The Formation of Undergraduate Thesis

	Numbers	Percentage
Independently completed	102	77.86%
Part of it is pieced together with other people's articles	24	18.32%
All of them are pieced together with other people's articles.	3	2.29%
Others	2	1.53%

Issues in Students' Undergraduate Thesis

According to the statistics of 131 questionnaires collected, more than 47% of students have problems in writing projects, such as outdated topics, insufficient language competence, unreasonable methods, loose chapter structure and non-standard format. The two most serious problems are the lack of coherent language expression and the loose structure of the thesis. See the following Table 6 for details:

Table 6 The issues in undergraduate thesis

	Numbers	Percentage
Outdated topics	62	47.33%

Insufficient language competence	113	86.26%
Unreasonable methodologies	68	51.91%
Loose chapter structure	94	71.76%
Non-Standard format	63	48.09%
Others	1	0.76%

III. Result

According to the above statistics in the prior section, the current situation of English majors' Bachelor theses in Panzhuhua University is unsatisfying. Although the university offers guidance to students on thesis writing, many still struggle to find appropriate resources, revealing a need for the university to make adjustments in its provision of thesis resources. Despite strong supervision from advisors over students' Bachelor thesis writing and providing guidance in areas such as finalizing topics, reviewing outlines, checking chapter structure, correcting language problems and standardizing article formats, students still have problems in these aspects, especially in chapter structure. It shows that the advisors' guidance is not comprehensive enough. Although most students can write their thesis independently, they have not paid enough attention to thesis, and there are still many writing issues.

IV. Discussion

Current Situation of Thesis Writing

Through the analysis of the questionnaire, students still have three main issues in the process of writing thesis. Firstly, academic resources are difficult to collect. Secondly, logic of the article is confusing. Thirdly, writing attitude is not positive.

Difficult Collection of Academic Resources

Among the 131 questionnaires, 76.34% of students say it is difficult to collect references, and 70.23% graduates find it difficult to collect data. According to the survey, in terms of references collection, many students find it is difficult to collect, because their thesis topics are relatively unpopular. And the students should leave university for internship in the final semester of senior year, so they could not use the university's free database. Then they need extra money to look up literature, which is difficult for college students who do not have much money. In terms of data collection, in order to ensure the authenticity and validity of data, many students use questionnaires to collect data, but it is difficult to collect their contact information because some respondents are unfamiliar with them and lack contact information. And they do not know how to design a questionnaire.

Confusing Logic of Article

According to the statistics of 131 questionnaires collected, 71.76% students said that their theses were loosely structured and lacked logic. 70.99% of the students expressed the hope that the advisor would deepen the guidance on the chapter structure and make it more detailed and clearer. Some students say that it is because they are not clear about the types of thesis's chapter structure and do not know whether their theses should be written in deduction and summary structure, parallel structure, progressive structure or comparative structure. So, they usually write whatever they think, wherever they think, and sometimes even write in a hurry to catch up with time. This leads to the loose structure of the thesis like a shopping list.

Negative Attitudes of Thesis Writing

According to the statistics of 131 questionnaires collected, 20.61% of the students indicate that their undergraduate theses are pieced together from other people's articles, which directly indicated the existence of plagiarism. According to the survey, the great mass of students think that undergraduate thesis is of little significance to them, and they finish the thesis in order to get the diploma, to facilitate their employment or business after graduation. Only a small number of students think that accomplishing the task is conducive to strengthening their writing and scientific research ability and laying a foundation for future work or research. So, many students are negative and perfunctory about thesis writing. Of course, many students will be in a confused state near graduation, not very clear about their future planning and goals.^[6] Therefore, many students do not really realize that the thesis is important for their life development.

Analysis of Causes for the Current Situation

Based on the above analysis and the results of previous studies, the causes of undergraduate thesis writing issues of English majors in Panzhihua University are explored from three aspects: the university, advisors and students. For the university, supply system of academic writing resources is not complete. For advisors, the guidance on the structure of the thesis is weak. For students, they do not attach importance to graduation thesis writing, and their investment in thesis writing is not enough. The following parts will analyze these aspects in detail.

Incomplete System for Supplying Academic Resources

The system for supplying academic writing resources is incomplete, primarily within the areas of reference and data collection. In terms of references collection, the university do not take into account that most students write their undergraduate theses in the final semester of senior year, and a quantity of them left the school because of internship. Although there are many references in the online library in Panzhihua University for students to consult for free, it is still difficult for students to collect references outside the campus because of the high cost of using the database at the off-campus IP address. In terms of data collection, in order to ensure the authenticity and validity of data, most students use the method of questionnaire to collect data.^[7] However, it remains challenging for students to collect data because they do not know how to design a reasonable questionnaire, how to use data collection tools, how to choose and contact participants. Furthermore, the university infrequently establishes specialized courses aimed at instructing students on how to perform effective data collection for thesis research. This shortcoming is one of the reasons that hinder students' capacity to conduct thorough and comprehensive research and potentially limit the quality of their theses.

Weak Guidance in Thesis Structure

From Table 2.7, 71.76% of the students indicated that their theses were loose in structure and confused in logic. As can be seen from Table 2.5, 70.99% of the students expressed the hope that advisors need to strengthen guidance in thesis structure. This data provides insight into the potential inadequacy of the current strategies utilized by advisors in providing guidance on thesis structure. Insufficient guidance from advisors on thesis structure can impede students' ability to develop a clear and coherent understanding of thesis writing. They will encounter many questions when writing, such as how to organize articles, how to connect paragraphs, how to ensure logical coherence and so on. All these factors may contribute to a decline in the quality of theses submitted by students, potentially resulting in lower scores.

Unreasonable Schedule of Thesis Writing

In the last semester of the senior year, students have to juggle a significant number of events and obligations related to their future personal arrangements which overlap with the time of thesis writing. The student's involvement in these job searches and exams, as well as the corresponding results (success or failure) can significantly influence the process of thesis writing.^[8] The student's individual capacity alone may not be adequate in handling the limited time and energy resources required to effectively balance workloads for exams, essay writing, and other related obligations. Consequently, the time allocated for fulfilling personal obligations related to future arrangements may reduce the time and energy available for completing the dissertation. In recent years, the pressure of employment for English majors is increasing, and so are the graduates of English majors in Panzhihua University. Some students go out for internships, and some students have to take the postgraduate entrance examination to improve their academic qualifications in order to find jobs. Therefore, most students spend a lot of time and energy on employment, and undergraduate thesis is even more dispensable for them. Therefore, this is the key factor for them to choose not to take thesis writing seriously, or even to copy other people's articles.

V. Conclusion

The primary objective of this research is to examine the present situation of undergraduate thesis writing among English majors at Panzhihua University. Its focus lies in uncovering the prevalent issues that hinder the thesis writing process and delving into the multifaceted reasons underpinning these challenges. Three principal concerns emerge from the analysis: firstly, students grapple with inadequate access to comprehensive academic resources, notably pertaining to the scarcity of relevant references and data. Secondly, the structural framework of theses often lacks coherence, with logical inconsistencies pervading the narrative. Lastly, students exhibit a less-than-enthusiastic approach towards thesis writing, reflecting a lack of positive mindset.

To address the challenges faced by students during undergraduate thesis writing, the university ought to prioritize enhancing and refining its academic resource support system. This entails establishing a dedicated references compilation team to curate a comprehensive and up-to-date library of resources, along with introducing a data collection course that equips students with the skills necessary for effective research.

Furthermore, thesis supervisors can play a pivotal role in strengthening the thesis writing curriculum by offering more intensive guidance. This includes assisting students in organizing their thesis content, outlining its structure, and imparting strategies for crafting well-structured arguments. By doing so, supervisors empower students with the tools to navigate the writing process more confidently.

Lastly, students themselves should adopt proactive measures to optimize their thesis writing experience. Establishing a writing schedule and forming a thesis writing peer support group can significantly improve productivity and motivation. By allocating dedicated time for writing and seeking feedback from peers, students can maintain a positive mindset towards their undergraduate thesis, recognizing its importance in their academic journey.

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