

RGC Ref. No.: UGC/FDS16/H01/15 <p>(please insert ref. above)</p>
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**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)

Completion Report
(for completed projects only)

<p><u>Submission Deadlines:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within <u>six</u> months of the approved project completion date. 2. Completion report: within <u>12</u> months of the approved project completion date.
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Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)

1. Project Title

An investigation of Hong Kong students' perceptions and experiences of English academic writing: A case study at the Open University of Hong Kong

2. Investigator(s) And Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Principal Investigator	TSO Wing-bo Associate Professor II	School of Arts and Social Sciences, The Open University of Hong Kong
Co-Investigator(s)	HO Siu-yee Lecturer (PT)	School of Education and Languages, The Open University of Hong Kong
Others	NA	NA

3. Project Duration

	Original	Revised	Date of RGC / Institution Approval (must be quoted)
Project Start Date	1 January 2016	NA	NA
Project Completion Date	30 June 2017	NA	NA
Duration (in month)	18 months	NA	NA
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	30 June 2018	NA	NA

Part B: The Final Report

5. Project Objectives

5.1 Objectives as per original application

1. Collect students' literacy histories, perceptions and actual experiences in learning academic writing for a case study
2. Identify and analyze the issues and challenges faced by local ESL students as they make sense of the academic writing process after entering university
3. Review the current English academic writing class setting at the University (OUHK) and suggest discipline-specific approaches in the learning and teaching of writing classes at university

5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: NA

Reasons for the change: NA

1. NA

2. NA

3. NA

5.3 Realisation of the objectives

(Maximum 1 page; please state how and to what extent the project objectives have been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)

The project objectives have been fully achieved: firstly, OUHK students' perceptions of academic writing and the major difficulties they faced were examined. Secondly, challenges of learning academic writing in the one-size-fit-all course setting were identified. Thirdly, challenges of teaching academic writing at university were explored. Finally, suggestions on how to improve the English academic writing course at OUHK were provided.

The research plan was on schedule. After the data were collected, the PI reported the research progress, data and observations annually in international conferences held at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, Canada), Ryerson University (Toronto, Canada), Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and the Higher Colleges of Technology, Abu Dhabi Women's College (UAE). The PI has also published two refereed journal articles to show the findings on students' literacy experiences and perceptions, and evaluate how the university's academic writing course may be improved to help ESL learners develop their academic literacy and writing strategies towards the written genres in their disciplines.

Stage	Task	Progress
One	Collected data from ENGL A101F students and their subject teachers	✓ Done
Two	Presented the research findings in international conferences	✓ Done
Three	Published the research outcomes in a peer-reviewed journal	✓ Done

Table 1: Research Plan for the Project

5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

Objectives (as per 5.1/5.2 above)	Addressed (please tick)	Percentage Achieved (please estimate)
1. Collect students' literacy histories, perceptions and actual experiences in learning academic writing for a case study	✓	100%
2. Identify and analyze the issues and challenges faced by local ESL students as they make sense of the academic writing process after entering university	✓	100%
3. Review the current English academic writing class setting at the University (OUHK) and suggest discipline-specific approaches in the learning and teaching of writing classes at university	✓	100%

6. Research Outcome

6.1 Major findings and research outcome

(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)

It was found that the one-size-fits-all course framework in the existing academic writing course has the following problems:

Insufficient discipline-specific training

Because of the one-size-fits-all academic writing course framework, the lecturer could only prepare general learning materials suitable for all rather than discipline-specific and genre-based course materials. The redundant nature of the course could be avoided if a range of discipline-specific academic writing courses could be tailor-made and offered to students coming from various disciplines.

Inadequate academic socialization

Academic socialization processes can take place successfully under two conditions: (1) when students can take discipline-specific academic writing courses more closely relevant to their majors; and (2) when the discipline-specific academic writing courses are taught by lecturers who are not just English teachers, but also members of the professional community. The student feedback generated from the survey, the interview, and the course evaluation indicated that there may be a need to shift the current general

language approach to a more specialized language approach. We recommend, therefore, that a range of discipline-specific academic writing teaching materials be tailor-made for students studying different majors.

Constraints for the ESL Academic Writing Course

It is indeed not an easy task to train students' textual competence, generic competence and social competence within a short course that lasts only for one term. Below are several major challenges for teachers when conducting the academic writing training course:

a. Class Size

As mentioned above, since the teacher-student ratio is 1:250+ in the lecture, apparently, frequent interactions, close monitoring, and active involvement of students in the classroom are hardly possible. More importantly, detailed marking of students' written essays and assessments is made almost impossible.

b. Physical setting of the class

Since there is not sufficient manpower and resources, the School can only afford to arrange eight tutorial classes for over 250 students each academic year. That means for each tutorial session, over 35 learners will have to sit in rows and columns in a relatively small room. Student-centred learning and close interactions are also made close to impossible in tutorial classes.

c. Redundant content for a diverse audience

Because students from various disciplines under creative arts, humanities, social sciences, and science and technology are put into one class, discipline-specific genre-based pedagogies are out of the question. Only generic topics such as grammatical mechanics, punctuations, academic reading and writing skills can be included. In other undergraduate courses such as modern drama, writing skills including essay structure developments, paraphrasing and summarizing are also taught as the teachers explain the essay assignment requirements. The unavoidable overlapping nature of the curriculum is worth noting.

d. Length of the course

The short duration of the course is a key matter of concern. Academic writing is not something that can be strengthened all of a sudden. The current university setting does not seem to have planned any follow-up academic literacy rapport beyond the first term.

6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action (*Maximum half a page*)

It is difficult to teach academic literacies in the classroom setting. The crux of the matter is that many students, parents, and even teachers thought that English language proficiency means academic writing skills, and many of them have also mistakenly equated academic writing skills with academic literacies. Because of the unfortunate misunderstanding between the three non-interchangeable concepts – English language proficiency, academic writing skills, and academic literacies, till this day, academic writing courses are still designed and delivered in the traditional but outdated one-size-fit-all deficit mode in many tertiary institutions in Hong Kong, and the English academic writing course in this case study is just one among many. Through the student survey statistics, end-of-course student feedback, examiners' evaluation reports, and academic written assignments collected from our research project at OUHK, we can put forward that the future development of the research and the proposed course of action

will be to (1) help university teachers change their traditional mindset, (2) build a more advanced literacy setting at university, and most of all, (3) develop a range of small-sized and more discipline-specific academic writing courses for ESL students of different majors.

7. Layman's Summary

(Describe in layman's language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words)

For many years, the learning of English academic writing has often been simplified as a linear process that involves only linguistic and cognitive inputs. Learners have been viewed as recipients rather than individuals who can actively interact in the learning process. Recent studies on academic English writing and learners' literacies have also criticized generic writing courses for turning a blind eye to sociocultural contexts and individual learners' needs and motivation, as well as variation of writing tasks in different disciplines. This research on academic writing therefore adopted a student-centred approach to exploring learners' needs and academic literacy backgrounds. Through the university students' questionnaire survey, written assignments, and external examiner's comments, it gave frontline tertiary English teachers the most up-to-date, first-hand and comprehensive data regarding the local ESL learners' education backgrounds, personal literacy memories, and self-perceptions of English academic writing. In addition, this project made an analysis of the major issues and challenges encountered by OUHK students taking the English academic writing course.

Part C: Research Output

8. Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising Directly From This Research Project

(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*)	Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the institutional repository (Yes or No)
Year of Publication	Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published)	Under Review	Under Preparation (optional)						
2017	NA	NA	NA	Chung Sau-kwan ¹	"Computer-assisted Language Learning: Collocation Analysis and Learning in Corpora", <i>The International Journal of Literacies</i> , volume 24.2, pages 33-44. (Journal)	No	Yes [Appendix I]	Yes	Yes

2017	NA	NA	NA	Tso, Wing-bo* & Ho Siu-yee	“Teaching English Academic Writing in the Second Language Classroom and Beyond”, <i>Canadian Journal for Teacher Research</i> , volume 5, n. pag. (Journal)	No	Yes [Appendix II]	Yes	Yes
2017	NA	NA	NA	Tso Wing-bo* & Chung Sau-kwan	“Academic literacy development: University students’ perceptions and experiences of English academic writing in Southeast Asia”, <i>Pacific-Asian Education</i> , volume 28, pages 51–61. (Journal)	Yes [Submitted to RGC in the progress report in Dec 2016]	No	Yes	Yes
2016	NA	NA	NA	Tso Wing-bo*, Ho Siu-yee & Chung Sau-kwan	“Academic Writing for Arts and Humanities Students” (Book)	No	Yes [Appendix III]	Yes	Yes

¹ Ms Chung, RA of the FDS project, is the sole author because the individual publication process was part of the research training the PI provided for her.

9. Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered

(Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)

Month / Year / Place	Title	Conference Name	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the institutional repository (Yes or No)
January 2017, Higher Colleges of Technology - Abu Dhabi Women's College, Abu Dhabi, UAE	Chances and Challenges: Teaching Academic Writing to University Students in Hong Kong	Pre-conference Convention of the International Conference on Education and Workforce Development'17	No	Yes [Appendix IV]	Yes	Yes
December 2016, Hong Kong Polytechnic University	A Case Study of Academic Literacy Development at The Open University of Hong Kong	11th International Symposium on Teaching English at Tertiary Level	Yes [Submitted to RGC in the progress report in Dec 2016]	No	Yes	Yes
July 2016, Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada	Issues in Teaching and Learning Academic Writing at University	Canadian International Conference on Advances in Education, Teaching & Technology 2016	Yes [Submitted to RGC in the progress report in Dec 2016]	No	Yes	Yes
July 2016, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada	Academic Literacy Development at University: A Case Study in Hong Kong	2016 Learning Conference: Education in the Age of the Anthropocene	Yes [Submitted to RGC in the progress report in Dec 2016]	No	Yes	Yes
July 2016, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada	Computer Assisted Language Learning: Collocation Analysis and Learning	2016 Learning Conference: Education in the Age of the Anthropocene	Yes [Submitted to RGC in the progress report in Dec 2016]	No	Yes	Yes
July 2016, The Open University of Hong Kong	Collocation Analysis of the Word 'habit': Corpus-based Approaches	The 2nd Conference on Digital Humanities: Digitization and Reconceptualization of the Humanities	Yes [Submitted to RGC in the progress report in Dec 2016]	No	Yes	Yes

10. Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning

(Please elaborate)

Yes, the FDS research experience and new knowledge has contributed to teaching and learning. Firstly, with a view to helping OU students improve their academic English proficiency and academic literacies, we designed a series of corpus-based teaching tool kit tailor made for arts and social sciences students. Secondly, To draw ESL

students' attention to the common sentence structures in academic writing, we also wrote simple notes and designed authentic text-based exercises in the learning kit. In addition, contextual content-based texts were used to illustrate academic essay structure and organization.

11. Student(s) Trained

(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)

Name	Degree Registered for	Date of Registration	Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation
NA			

12. Other Impact

(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)

Teaching enhancement:

- The PI and Co-I were invited to give an invited lecture cum workshop, "Academic Writing Workshop" for the members of Hong Kong Air Cadet Corps Vocational Qualifications Unit, Hong Kong Aviation Club on 22 January 2017.
- The PI and Co-I were invited to give a guest seminar, "Chances and Challenges: Teaching Academic Writing to University Students" for the English lecturers and instructors at HKBU's Language Centre on 25 April 2016.

13. Public Access Of Completion Report

(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)

Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access	Reasons
NA	NA

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FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)

Completion Report - Attachment
(for completed projects only)

RGC Ref. No.: UGC/FDS16/H01/15

Principal Investigator: TSO Wing-bo

Project Title: An investigation of Hong Kong students' perceptions and experiences of English academic writing: A case study at the Open University of Hong Kong

Statistics on Research Outputs

	Peer-reviewed Journal Publications	Conference Papers	Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters	Patents Awarded	Other Research Outputs (Please specify)
No. of outputs arising directly from this research project [or conference]	3	6	1	0	Nil