Common Writing Challenges in Academic English among Chinese Nursing Undergraduates

Bartlomiej Kuszel

Email: lzu_kuszel@lzu.edu.cn

School of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Lanzhou University. China

Abstract

The study examines the most common writing challenges in Academic English faced by Chinese undergraduate nursing students. Despite meeting the general English proficiency benchmark of College English Test Band 4, many students struggle with the academic writing conventions necessary for success in university and professional nursing contexts. The analysis was based on writing samples taken throughout the term from 38 second-year nursing students from a university in Northwest China. The mistakes were categorized according to Ferris' taxonomy of errors (1995, 2002, 2012). Results show that surface-level errors, including punctuation, spelling, and mechanics, were the most common, accounting for more than one-third of all errors. However, more profound grammatical issues, particularly errors in verb form, collocation mistakes, and article omissions, had a greater impact on clarity and academic tone. The findings suggest that many errors stem from interference with the first language (L1). This study emphasizes the importance of instructional strategies that focus on verb use, sentence structure, and genre-appropriate vocabulary. The article discusses practical approaches to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a global rise in English language proficiency among medical and nursing professionals. As global healthcare systems become more interconnected, the ability to not only read and write but also to speak and listen effectively in English becomes a necessity. Increasingly often Chinese nursing majors are required to demonstrate proficiency in Academic English (Li & Wang, 2023). Wang et al. (2024) states that there is a growing number of both foreign patients and international academic exchanges that require nurses in China to communicate in English.

Despite years of compulsory general English education, many nursing students and nurses report a gap between their knowledge and real-world requirements (Zhang et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2023). Wang et al. (2024) report that the overall level of English among nurses remains inadequate, negatively impacting foreign-related nursing work and further professional development. According to Olson (2012), many Chinese nurses struggle with understanding

instructions given to them by their foreign supervisors. Nursing students' limited writing proficiency has a negative impact on their academic learning and career development. The challenge of creating coherent academic writing is especially evident in final assessments, where students are required to apply academic writing conventions under timed conditions.

While every college student in China is required to demonstrate a particular proficiency in English by passing the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4), nursing students may find this standard insufficient for their needs. CET-4 is equivalent to B1/B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages scale. However, this refers to general English ability, not English for Academic Purposes (EAP), which is more relevant to nursing contexts.

This article aims to identify and analyse the most common English writing errors made by nursing undergraduates at a Chinese university during a semester-long Academic English Writing course. The goal of this article is to provide English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instructors with practical insight into errors made by undergraduate nursing students.

Numerous studies have underscored the importance of English proficiency for Chinese nurses in clinical, academic, and international settings (Zhang et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2023). However, relatively few discuss the specific challenges that nursing students face in producing academic writing in English. This study addresses this gap by identifying and analysing the most common errors in the academic writing of Chinese undergraduate nursing students to support more targeted and effective teaching practices.

METHOD

Data for this paper came from the written work of 38 sophomore nursing students who participated in an Academic Writing course at a prominent university in Northwest China. The course was compulsory and lasted 18 weeks, comprising 27 sessions, each session lasting 90 minutes. The students were second-year university students aged between 20 and 23, with ten males and twenty-eight females. All the students were enrolled in a four-year undergraduate nursing program. The proficiency level of the students' general English was at B1/B2 according to the CEFR scale. The level was assessed using the CET-4 exam.

The students had no prior exposure to writing in an Academic English context. While the CET-4 exam includes a writing component, it is limited to a 120-180 word opinion, argumentative essay on a general topic, a letter, a proposal, a notice, or an expansion of an already outlined essay. The writing section accounts for 15% of the total score during the exam, the same amount as the translation part, and less than the reading and listening components, which make up 35% of the total score each. The English Academic Writing course's goal was to introduce students to English Academic writing conventions and help them to master writing using a five-paragraph essay model.

Throughout the course, students practised writing at paragraph and essay levels. The teaching model included a theoretical introduction, in-class assignments assessed by peers and the teacher, and concluded with a summative assignment. Assignments were submitted online, using a university-approved LMS, individually checked for plagiarism and use of AI. In cases where AI was used, students were asked to resubmit their work. The summative assignments included a focused introduction, body paragraph, conclusion, a mid-term exam, and a full five-paragraph essay for their final exam. The final exam was written during a separate session, under timed conditions, without the use of electronic devices. The writing samples used as a source of data for this study included three assignments, namely an introduction, a body paragraph, a conclusion, and a full essay from the final exam. In total, four writing samples were taken from

every student. Final exam essays and individual assignments were anonymised, with all identifying details removed, and analyzed to identify common writing issues.

Mistakes were analysed and organised according to Ferris' (1995, 2002, 2012) taxonomy. Ferris's taxonomy was chosen as it offers a well-structured framework consistent with the study's goal of identifying the most frequent academic writing errors among Chinese nursing undergraduates.

Ferris (1995, 2002, 2012) categorises errors in second language writing into treatable and untreatable categories, providing detailed subcategories for analysis. Treatable errors follow predictable linguistic rules and can be addressed with explicit instruction and correction. Untreatable errors do not follow predictable rules or patterns, making them difficult to explain or correct directly. Subcategories include verb errors, noun/articles errors, word form errors, word choice/lexical errors, sentence structure errors, and punctuation and mechanical errors. Mistakes were manually annotated and grouped across students. Only recurring patterns found in the writing of three or more students were included in the final analysis.

The data were analysed following Corder's (1974) steps of error analysis. First, each writing sample was examined word by word and sentence by sentence. Coding categories were generated following Ferris' (1995, 2002, 2012) taxonomy. Second, the number of errors was counted and converted into a percentage. Table 1 presents the error analysis. Sample mistakes from each subcategory were chosen to highlight the categories.

RESULTS

Analysis of the errors revealed distinct patterns in the types and distribution of writing issues. Surface errors, namely punctuation and mechanics, proved to be the most frequent errors, accounting for a total of over 37% of all errors, with comma (7.1%) and spelling (6%) errors being particularly prominent within this subcategory. The most common type of errors was verb form errors, accounting for 7.3% of all errors. This type of error belongs to the subcategory of verb-related errors, which was the second-largest category, accounting for 17.6% of errors. Noun and article errors, which accounted for 13.5% were also common, particularly article omission and pluralisation errors. The fourth most common error types were sentence structure errors, with sentence fragments being the most frequent. Word choice and word form errors were less frequent, accounting for 11.4% and 7.7% of all errors. Although they were infrequent, they impaired the readability and clarity of the message.

Table 1. Analysis of errors

Main Category	Subcategory	Number	Percentage (%)
Verb Errors	Verb tense errors	49	3.8
	Subject–verb agreement errors	61	4.7
	Verb form errors	94	7.3
	Passive/active voice errors	13	1.0
	Omission of auxiliary verbs	44	3.4
	Misuse of modal verbs	23	1.8
Noun/Article Errors	Omission of articles	58	4.5
	Unnecessary articles	23	1.8
	Wrong article choice	19	1.5
	Countable/uncountable noun errors	28	2.2
	Plural/singular noun errors	49	3.8

	Possessive errors	18	1.4
	Noun form errors	34	2.6
Word Form Errors	Noun for adjective	20	1.5
	Adjective for adverb	29	2.2
	Verb for noun	13	1.0
	Adverb for adjective	11	0.9
	Gerund/infinitive errors	26	2.0
Word Choice Errors	Misused collocations	34	2.6
	Wrong prepositions	45	3.5
	Wrong idioms/fixed expressions	15	1.2
	L1 interference	25	1.9
	Lexical inaccuracy	29	2.2
Sentence Structure Errors	Fragments	40	3.1
	Run-on sentences	29	2.2
	Comma splices	32	2.5
	Word order errors	27	2.1
	Dangling modifiers	9	0.7
	Misuse of conjunctions	19	1.5
Punctuation/Mechanics	Spelling errors	78	6.0
	Capitalisation errors	47	3.6
	Comma errors	92	7.1
	Period errors	41	3.2
	Apostrophe errors	27	2.1
	Hyphen/dash errors	20	1.5
	Other mechanics	26	2.0
TOTAL		1,293	100

Tense misuse, article omission, and word choice errors are among the issues that can be plausibly attributed to L1 interference. Mandarin Chinese does not use inflection on verbs for tense or number, nor does it use articles in the same semantic way as English; hence, students may tend to omit or misuse these. Patterns of literal translation further highlight the first language transfer. The results show that, although surface-level errors, such as punctuation and spelling, were the most common, it is the deeper grammatical and lexical issues that pose a significant barrier to producing fluent academic writing.

Analysis

1. Sentence Structure.

Following Ferris' (1995, 2002, 2012) taxonomy, sentence structure errors were divided into run-on sentences, comma splices, word order problems, dangling modifiers and sentence fragments.

1.1 Run-on   sentences

Run-on sentences are sentences in which two or more independent clauses are incorrectly   connected   with   a   conjunction   or   a   comma. Example:

"Second, make single-use plastics uses a lot of energy and resources, but single- use plastics   just   are   thrown   away   after   using   once.   It   is   a   waste." Analysis:

This example includes multiple independent clauses. The structure of the first sentence

is awkward and grammatically flawed. The phrase "…make single-use plastics uses…" contains a verb form error. The repetition of "single-use plastics" reduces clarity. The first sentence can be qualified as a run-on, as it is formed by two independent clauses joined by a comma. It is considered a run-on sentence. Possible correction:
 "Second, manufacturing single-use plastics uses a substantial amount of energy and resources, yet they are discarded after one use, which is a waste."

1.2 Sentence fragments

Sentence fragments are incomplete sentences. Such sentences may omit a subject, a verb, or an object, or contain an incomplete thought. They may resemble complete sentences, yet they cannot function independently and may confuse the reader. Example:
"With the development of science and technology."
Analysis:
The sentence is a sentence fragment, as the prepositional phrase lacks a main clause. The sentence does not include a subject or a finite verb and expresses an incomplete thought. It introduces an idea, but fails to develop it. Possible correction:
"Thanks to the development of science and technology, social media could enter a golden era. "

1.3 Comma splice

A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses are joined with a comma but without a coordinating conjunction.
Example:
"Besides, not everyone can pay attention to the trash separation, people may be throw them mistakenly , which is bad to trash separation."
Analysis:
The independent clauses "not everyone can pay attention to the trash separation" and "people may be throw them mistakenly" are connected with just a comma, lacking a coordinating conjunction. Additionally, the sentence contains errors in verb forms and word choice.
Possible correction:
 "Besides, not everyone pays attention to separating trash. People may accidentally put trash in the wrong bin, harming the separation process."

1.4 Word order issues

Sentences in English should follow a Subject+Verb+Object structure, with adverbs typically placed after verbs, but before main verbs. Word order issues occur when words are misplaced, resulting in awkward phrasing.
Example:
"They usually are throwed by using shortly…"
Analysis:
The sentence contains a misplaced adverb "usually", placed before the auxiliary verb "are". In standard English, the adverb "usually" should be placed after the auxiliary verb. Furthermore, the verb "throwed" is an incorrect past participle form of the verb

"throw", and the phrase "by using shortly" is unclear. Possible correction:
"They are usually thrown away shortly after use…"

1.5 Dangling modifiers

A dangling modifier occurs when a modifier does not logically or refer to a word in the clause, which often leads to confusion.
Example:
"With the development of artificial intelligence, it can take on more and more jobs."
Analysis:
The pronoun "it" appears to be modified by the introductory phrase "With the development of artificial intelligence"; however, it is unclear what "it" refers to, making the sentence confusing.
Possible Correction:
"With the development of artificial intelligence, AI can take on more and more jobs."

2. Word Choice Errors

Ferris (1995, 2002, 2012) divided lexical errors into several categories, including confused words, collocation errors, incorrect prepositions, and literal translations.

2.1 Collocation Errors

Collocation errors occur when words are combined in a way that is grammatically correct but not naturally used by native speakers.
Example:
"…decomposed difficultly by microorganisms…"
Analysis:
While grammatically possible, "decomposed difficultly" is not a standard collocation used in English. A more naturally sounding expression could be "difficult to decompose".
Possible correction:
"…are difficult to decompose by microorganisms…"

2.2 Literal Translation

Literal translations are inferences from the language user's native language.
Example:
"Banning plastics will make them caused a lot of economic pressure."
Analysis:
The sentence follows the Chinese sentence pattern "make [someone]…cause [something]", which is not native to the English language.
Possible correction:
"Banning plastics will cause much economic pressure for them."

2.3 Wrong preposition

Wrong preposition errors occur when a language user chooses a preposition that does not appropriately collocate with the surrounding words, resulting in an awkward or incorrect expression. These types of errors often occur among L2 learners as the prepositional usage differs between languages.
Example:

"…discussions can help students to have a better understanding on knowledge."
Analysis:
The preposition "on" rarely collocates with the noun "understanding" in this context. In academic English, the correct preposition is "of"; additionally, "to have" can be omitted to improve fluency.
Possible correction:
"…discussions can help students gain a better understanding of knowledge."

3. Verb Errors

According to Ferris (1995, 2002, 2012), verb errors are among the most frequent and should be prioritised for correction as they obscure meaning and are teachable. Verb errors were divided into different categories, including subject-verb agreement errors, verb form errors, and omission of auxiliary verbs.

3.1 Subject-Verb Agreement errors

Subject-verb agreement errors occur when the verb does not agree in number or person with its subject. These errors can impair the grammatical accuracy of a sentence and are often noticeable to readers.
Example:
"It affect people's psychology"
Analysis:
The singular subject "It" requires a singular verb; however, "affect" is in plural form and should be changed to "affects" to agree with the subject.
Possible correction:
"It affects people's psychology."

3.2 Verb Form Error

Ferris (2002) identifies verb form errors as mistakes in the morphological construction of verbs, including incorrect use of participles and confusion between gerunds and infinitives. These types of errors are common and can impair meaning.
Example:
"…social media has became a key part of people's daily life.'
Analysis:
The present perfect construction requires the verb "became" in the past participle form "become".
Possible correction:
"…social media has become a key part of people's daily life.'

3.3 Omission of Auxiliary verbs

Omission of auxiliary verbs occurs when necessary, and verbs such as 'be', 'have', or 'do' are left out. These types of errors are prevalent among L2 students whose L1 does not use auxiliaries in the same way English does.
Example:
"Online classes do not as effective as tradition in-peson leaming."
Analysis:
The comparative structure 'do not as effective as' is incorrect as "effective" is an adjective, thus requiring a linking verb "are". Additionally, the phrase contains a spelling

error ("leaming") and a word choice issue ("tradition"). Possible correction: "Online classes are not as effective as traditional in-person learning.'

4. Noun/Article Errors

According to Ferris (1995, 2002, 2012), noun/article errors are mistakes related to noun forms and the use of nouns, including the use of articles and pluralisation. These mistakes may not obstruct the meaning, but they affect the grammatical accuracy and fluency of writing.

4.1 Plural/singular noun errors

Plural and singular noun errors refer to the incorrect usage of uncountable or singular nouns, omitting the plural ending, or using the wrong number form.
Example:
"many teenage are addicted"
Analysis:
The determiner 'many' is used with countable plural nouns. The noun "teenage" is not only misspelt but also lacks the necessary plural ending. The correct plural form is "teenagers."
Possible correction:
"…many teenagers are addicted."

4.2 Omission of articles

An article omission error occurs when language users omit a necessary article that English grammar requires. These types of errors are widespread among L2 students whose mother language does not require the use of articles.
Example:
"It is necessity for people to undertand how to correct use it."
Analysis:
The noun "necessity" is a singular, countable noun, which therefore requires an indefinite article in this context. What is more, "undertand" is a misspelling and "correct use" is a verb form error.
Possible correction:
"It is a necessity for people to understand how to use it correctly."

5. Word Form Errors

Word form errors occur when a language user uses the wrong grammatical category of a word. Ferris (2002) defines these errors as treatable through instruction on morphology and word function. Often, these types of errors result from L1 transfer.

5.1 Using an Adjective Instead of an Adverb

This error occurs when language users use an Adjective instead of an Adverb in a context where an adverb is required. As adverbs typically modify nouns, and not verbs, this mistake may cause an ungrammatical expression.
Example:
"While online classes is convenient, it often lack the effectiveness of traditional in-person learning.

Analysis:
The word "convenient" is an adjective, but in the above sentence, it modifies the verb phrase "is" as it describes how online classes are delivered. As a result, the adverb "conveniently" should be used. Furthermore, "classes is" is a subject-verb agreement error and should be corrected to "classes are"
Possible correction:
"While online classes are delivered conveniently, they often lack the effectiveness of traditional in-person learning.

5.2 Gerund/infinitive errors

Gerund/infinitive errors occur when language users use the incorrect non-finite form of the verb after a particular verb, adjective, or preposition.
Example:
"…more and more people don't want to thinking…"
Analysis:
The verb "want" is usually followed by a to-infinitive, which makes the phrase "to think" incorrect.
Possible correction:
"…more and more people do not want to think…"

6. Punctuation/Mechanics errors

These types of errors may not impede understanding or the clarity of the message; however, they affect fluency and polish.

6.1 Comma errors

Comma errors refer to incorrect use, overuse or omission of commas in written English. These errors can disrupt the clarity and flow of a sentence, confusing the reader.
Example:
"First and foremost Eating more green, life more happiness."
Analysis:
In standard written English, a comma should follow an introductory phrase to separate it from the main clause. Additionally, the sentence contains grammar and word choice issues.
Possible correction:
"First and foremost, eating more greens leads to a happier life. "

6.2 Spelling errors

Spelling errors are typically rule-based or memory-based; they do not usually affect meaning, but can significantly impact the credibility and readability of writing.
Example:
"Some students in order to complishing homework, all problems use AI to solve. "
Analysis:
The phrase "complishing" is probably a misspelling of "accomplishing". However, even though the correctly spelled word sounds unnatural in this context, it reflects both a verb form error and an inappropriate word choice. A more naturally sounding verb would be "complete," as it better collocates with "homework."

Possible   correction:
"In order to complete homework, some students use AI to solve all problems. "

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify and analyse the most common mistakes in academic English writing among Chinese undergraduate nursing students during an academic English Writing course.

Mistakes were categorised according to Ferris' taxonomy (1995, 2002, 2012). The most common mistake category was Punctuation/Mechanics errors, making up 37.7% of all errors. These types of errors are surface-level and include capitalisation, spelling, punctuation and formatting. They do not inhibit understanding; however, they negatively influence readability. The second most common category was verb errors, making up 17.6% of all errors. Verb errors affect both accuracy and comprehensibility, making them a priority for correction (Ferris, 2002). The most common errors were verb form errors, accounting for 7.3% of all errors.

Word choice and word form errors, while not common, contributed to non-native-like academic writing that impaired the clarity of the message.

Interpretation   in   Light   of   Previous   Research
The findings align with prior studies, which indicate that Chinese nursing students often struggle with transferring general English knowledge to the specific requirements of academic writing (Zhang et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2023). The commonality of verb form errors aligns with previous findings by Hinkel (2004), Chan (2010), and Wang & Wen (2002), which underscore the prevalence of verb form errors among Chinese students of English. The occurrence of word form and word choice errors may be a sign that Chinese students rely on L1 transfer. This reliance may be due to limited exposure to idiomatic Academic English and a lack of morphological   inflexion   in   Chinese.

A study by Severino and Prim (2015) suggests that approximately one-fifth of the word choice errors stem from literal translations from Chinese. In the present study we can see the influence of Chinese in sentences like: "Here are some of my views about AI's influence as follows', which is a word-for-word translation of 以下是我的几点看法; "As a as praes say, every coins have has its two sides", which attempts to include two Chinese phrases: 每个硬币都有两面 and 正如谚语所说; "With the development of artificial intelligence, it can take on more and more jobs.", which, although not incorrect, follows a common Chinese essay opening structure   随着……的发展,   which   translation   sounds   formulaic   in   English.

Despite the issues with word forms and word choices, many students were able to incorporate proper Medical English vocabulary into their exam essays. Among properly used phrases, we can see 'obesity', 'nutritious options', 'balanced diets', 'mental well-being', 'immune system', 'bacterium' and 'potential risks to human health'. The instances of choosing more major-related vocabulary occurred mostly among essays with fewer mistakes. In the exam essays, literal translation mistakes occurred multiple times in connection with verb form errors; an example of this is "…help students open brain…" which is a literal translation and could be corrected to "…help students open their minds…". The most common co-occurring error pair was spelling errors with comma errors, which accounted for 13.1% of all the errors. This common co-occurrence may indicate that during high-pressure conditions, such as the final exam or summative assignment, students were more focused on generating ideas, using correct grammar and proper word choice than on surface-

level proofreading. Another notable co-occurring error type was verb form errors combined with literal translation, which indicates a direct L1 transfer, as Mandarin Chinese does not employ verb morphology in the same way English does. For a similar reason, article omission and plural noun errors frequently co-occurred, most likely because Mandarin Chinese does not use inflexion for definiteness and number.

Implications for Teaching Practice

The results highlight the need to incorporate targeted instructional strategies in Academic English writing courses for nursing students.

The most common errors in the analysed texts involved punctuation, spelling, and general mechanics. According to Hinkel (2004), these surface-level errors may be caused by L1 interferences. While these surface-level errors may not significantly hinder the content as much as verb form or noun errors, they do reduce the author's credibility (Ferris, 2002; Hyland, 2006).

To address these challenges, especially at the CET-4 level and below, instructors can provide scaffolded feedback focused on mechanics. Practical strategies may include the use of bilingual editing checklists or peer review rubrics that highlight punctuation and spelling (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Frequent low-stakes writing tasks allowing revisions based on instructor and peer feedback can strengthen students' editing skills and build their metalinguistic awareness (Evans, Hartshorn, & Strong-Krause, 2011). Additionally, exercises using authentic student writing, such as comma placement, may help students improve their surface-level skills while minimizing anxiety.

The second most common error category was verb-related errors. Verb errors include incorrect tense, missing auxiliary, or misuse of verb forms. Difficulties with verb forms can be partially attributed to L1 transfer. Verbs in Chinese do not conjugate for tense or agreement; thus, numerous students may overlook morphological endings in English (Ferris, 2002; Hinkel, 2004). Inaccurate use of verbs often hinders comprehensibility. To address these issues, instructors should provide regular and focused instruction on verb tenses relevant to academic writing, especially present simple, present perfect and past perfect. Using real examples from students' writing can raise awareness of common verb errors and reinforce correct verb patterns.

Furthermore, guided correction activities can help students identify errors in verb usage. Research by Bitchener and Ferris (2012) and Ellis (2009) suggests that combining metalinguistic feedback with revisions can improve students' long-term accuracy. Additionally, when instructing students at lower levels of proficiency, such as CET-4, activities should include controlled variation tasks to build students' flexibility and confidence.

Article omission and plural/singular mismatches made up 4.5% and 3.8% of all errors. Previous studies, including Hinkel (2004), found that article omission is prevalent among Chinese students. These difficulties originate from L1 interference, as the Chinese language does not mark nouns for definiteness or number in the same way English does. These types of errors can impact the clarity of students' writing, particularly in academic contexts. To address these errors, instructors should not only explicitly teach the semantic function of articles but also reinforce pluralisation rules with academic vocabulary commonly used in the nursing context. Practical activities could include editing anonymized student texts, contrastive examples that show how articles influence meaning, or sentence-combining tasks that require correct article and number agreement. According to Bitchener and Ferris (2012) and Ellis (2009), incorporating visual cues, such as underlining and marginal comments, may help students identify and revise these errors.

Sentence structure errors were consistently observed in the writing samples, with sentence fragments occurring most often. These problems are likely a cause of differences between Mandarin Chinese and English sentence organisation. These errors may impede readability and academic tone, which can be detrimental in the EAP context. To better address sentence structure errors, instructors can incorporate explicit instruction on English sentence structure and use contrastive analysis to highlight how English handles subordination, coordination, and sentence-final punctuation. Practical strategies might include combining and de-combining sentence tasks, which would require students to reconstruct scrambled sentences. Incorporating peer-review sessions with a clear, structured checklist may prove beneficial to students as well. Targeted instructor feedback may also reinforce self-monitoring.

Word form errors were the least common; however, their presence is especially noticeable in formal writing as they obstruct fluency and academic tone. These errors may be caused by students' difficulty in recognizing grammatical categories, as Mandarin Chinese does not use explicit morphological markers for different parts of speech. To address these issues, instructors may include activities focused on the morphology of words. An exercise in which students notice word families and practice converting forms in context may prove especially helpful. Additionally, gap-fill tasks, sentence transformation activities and peer-review sessions focused on word forms can increase students' awareness of correct usage.

Literal translation and collocation errors were not as common as other errors, with both combined accounting for over 4% of all errors. These errors are widespread among Chinese students of English (Lu, 2016). Liu, D., & Shaw, P. (2001) suggest that these errors arise from literal translation and extensive miscollocations. These types of errors not only obstruct meaning but also may be inappropriate in academic contexts, affecting students' credibility. To address this issue, instructors can teach collocation explicitly with the help of discipline-specific word lists. An activity in which students analyze expert models and student writing can help raise awareness of what is acceptable in English academic writing. Research by Hinkel (2004) and Liu and Shaw (2001) suggest that corpus-informed instruction, including collocation-building exercises, should be followed up by the teacher's feedback that focuses on correctness, appropriateness, and register.

Overlapping error patterns, such as plural noun and article omission errors, or verb form errors and literal translations, highlight the need for integrated instruction, which discusses the interaction of these errors instead of isolating them. A set of classroom activities combining noticing, categorising, and editing could help students identify how multiple minor issues disrupt fluency when combined. Additionally, focusing students' attention on a recurring combination may improve their awareness and revision practices in the future.

Limitations

While offering insights into the common issues in English academic writing among Chinese nursing undergraduates, this study is subject to several limitations. The sample size was limited to 38 second-year students from the same university, which limits the generalizability of the results. Despite efforts to maintain consistency and clarity, manual error identification and coding may introduce potential subjectivity. As the data included only writing samples, the study does not accurately reflect the overall proficiency in English among the studied group. As the data was collected during the term from students' assignments and exams, the results may have been shaped by the course content, teaching methods, and assessment practices. While the study highlights meaningful patterns, the results should be interpreted with caution and may not be broadly applicable.

Recommendations for Future Research

As this study had limitations in certain areas, future research can address them to advance further the understanding of the issues related to academic English writing among Chinese nursing undergraduates.

Future studies could explore the impact of more targeted instructional interventions on reducing the most common error types identified in this research. Longitudinal studies could help examine how students' writing skills develop over time and whether continuous instruction leads to visible and measurable improvements. More diverse, comparative studies conducted across universities in various regions of China can help determine whether the error patterns present in this cohort are representative or localised. Incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data, as well as using larger and more diverse samples, could enhance the robustness and generalisability of future findings.

These directions could close the current research gaps and support the development of more effective Academic English writing programs tailored to the needs of nursing students.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify and analyse the most common errors in academic English writing made by Chinese undergraduate nursing students. By identifying frequent error types, the study shed light on the concrete linguistic challenges present in the studied group. It offered practical guidance for EAP instructors seeking to improve their writing instruction.

Addressing the highlighted writing difficulties is crucial not only for improving students' academic performance but also for preparing them to communicate clearly and accurately in English. Continuation of this research and incorporation of the findings will help Chinese nursing students navigate through the academic demands of the increasingly international healthcare environment.

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