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Nataliia Aleksandrova,
PhD (Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences), associate professor,
Larysa Sluchaina,
PhD (Candidate of Political Sciences), associate professor,
Foreign Languages and Intercultural Communication Department,
Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman
54/1 Peremohy Avenue, Kyiv, Ukraine

ENHANCING PhD STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS IN THE PROCESS OF LEARNING ENGLISH

The paper aims to substantiate the designed technique of PhD students' academic writing skills development, which includes the stages of formation, the content and functional components, as well as the corresponding organizational forms and methods of interaction between a teacher and postgraduate students in the process of learning a foreign language. At the initial and final stages of the verification of the effectiveness of the implementation of the developed technique, specially designed diagnostic methods and questionnaires aimed at identifying value orientations and motives of studying the basics of academic writing, the initial and acquired levels of language knowledge (English) at the postgraduate level in the process of studying the discipline were applied. The evaluation of the results took place according to the following criteria: value orientations and motives, knowledge of academic vocabulary and grammatical accuracy; and indicators: motives, vocabulary, lexical knowledge, grammatical awareness, academic writing skills. As a result of the study, most of the respondents (n=50) had insufficient knowledge and skills of academic writing. As a result of the carried out experiment, the effectiveness of implementation of the designed technique has been proved.

Keywords: *PhD students, academic writing skills, research work, method of developing skills, enhancing academic writing skills, academic writing style.*

Introduction

In Ukraine, the system of higher and post-graduate education is currently facing critical changes and consequently its dynamic development. Thus, it is quite important to organize the educational process in such a way that students will be able to comprehend all areas of professional development, which, in turn, should ensure the formation of a holistic experience of independent scientific and cognitive activity, as well as significantly change the level of professional culture.

According to statistical evidence, approximately 10% of all postgraduate students are willing and do continue their further education at post-graduate training courses. That is why students' research activity at university is primarily supposed to involve educating and cultivating search and research skills, analytical ones, necessary skills for the analysis of the sources base, history and graphical studies; they should be able to cover the results of scientific and theoretical research. The ultimate goal of performing independent tasks is not only the process of mastering knowledge, but also obtaining creative awareness and scientific knowledge at the heuristic-search level, taking into account the integration of different ways of learning and acquiring information.

Within the framework of the Bologna Process, which envisages a three-tier system of higher education (Bachelor-Master-Doctor of Philosophy), in order to obtain a PhD degree a postgraduate student is expected to master particular competences. This list is based on the Dublin Descriptors, which are the basis of the European Quali-

cations Framework. According to it, the degree of Doctor of Philosophy can be attributed to those who:

- profoundly understand the research field and possess holistic knowledge, skills and research methods in a particular field;
- initiate, implement and correct a consistent process of sound scientific research, with due respect for academic integrity;
- contribute to the national science by conducting an original study aimed at providing an increase in knowledge due to a substantial amount of work and part of which deserves to be published in national as well as in international peer-reviewed publications;
- are able to critically analyze, assess and evaluate new and complex ideas;
- can professionally communicate with colleagues, the wider scientific community and society as a whole in issues related to a particular area of the scholar's expertise;
- can justify and promote technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge-based society [3].

Moreover, in accordance with Article 5 of the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education", the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is an educational and simultaneously the first academic degree obtained at the third level of higher education on the basis of a master's degree. The degree of Doctor of Philosophy is awarded by a specialized academic council as a result of successful completion by a postgraduate student of an appropriate educational and scientific program and public defense of a dissertation in a specialized academic council" [3].

At the postgraduate level, PhD students are expected to demonstrate considerable improvement in the depth and quality of their academic understanding not only in their native language (Ukrainian), but also in a foreign one. During their research experience they are certain to be asked to undertake new types of assignment and produce work that is much more detailed and critically reasoned. They may also be writing articles for academic journals and presenting their research at conferences and formal proceedings.

Consequently, this experience requires and implies a profound and thorough training which is notably aimed at developing and enhancing academic writing skills. It is considerably essential to those PhD students who learnt English only for two years during their Bachelor degree education. They significantly lack language and speaking experience.

The issues of organizing, developing and enhancing students and PhD students' research work have always been in the scope of academic search and study. So, V. Lugovy, V. Mayboroda and O. Yaroshenko explicitly advocated the conceptual and methodological foundations of organizing students' research activity at higher educational institutions [7; 8; 11]. They mainly paid attention to managing the research work in the professional fields such as pedagogy, mathematics, philology and other major subjects but in the Ukrainian language. Whereas the current trends of integrating the Ukrainian science into the European scope require vast research and academic skills in a foreign language, English for example. PhD students encounter language difficulties in rendering the message of their research works, they are unable to make public speaking in English; they lack required vocabulary and academic writing skills. Moreover, V. Mayboroda identified core competences necessary for fruitful PhD students' research work, among which he pointed out intellectual and knowledge competences implying acquiring foreign language skills [8, p. 160]. So we face a necessity to design practical tips and guidelines how to develop and enhance the above mentioned skills in PhD students who did not learn English profoundly.

Publications concerning the outlined issue (I. Slipuhina, I. Chernetskiy) are primarily dedicated to implementing engineering and scientific methods in the research work [9]; L. Strelchenko focused on enhancing informational and communicative competences of future scholars omitting the idea of developing foreign language competences in the process of acquiring academic experience [10, p. 227].

Thus, we can conclude that among this variety of research we lack issues describing peculiarities and basic requirements for writing academic papers and articles in international scientific journals in a foreign language, notably English. It would be quite reasonable to refer PhD students to publications which exactly and concisely analyze and specify the relevant vocabulary, language techniques, structure and style attributive to writing academic papers.

These issues are unfortunately left beyond the national scholars' research scope. From our personal experience we can state that the requirements as well as the

structure and methodology of writing academic papers in their variety (abstract, essay, dissertation, articles, summaries) in international scientific journals considerably differ from our national ones.

Aim and Tasks

That is the paper is *aimed at* introducing, describing and revealing our approach to developing and namely enhancing PhD students' academic writing skills. We shall specify our method.

Before introducing the method we shall clarify the specifics of the foreign language training of PhD students at the faculty of International Economics and Management at Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman, which namely lies in the following: the initial level of language training of postgraduates from the faculty of International Economics and Management is much higher (they learn English for four years) than the level of postgraduates from other faculties (they learn English only for two years). That is why our method is mainly focused on the latter category of PhD students.

We should also state that their research work involves independent studying and analyzing foreign-language authentic sources related to the area of their research with further analytical and critical review (writing summaries, abstracts, conclusions), generalizing and consolidating academic information, identifying personally meaningful information and advocating its relevance for the research. In order to motivate PhD students for independent research, we encourage them to use modern sources on topical issues of management, economics, marketing and business (working with the original articles from Harvard Business Review, The Financial Times, The Economists).

At the beginning of our research we investigated that the majority of PhD students even with a high level the language competence are unable to render the messages of articles due to a lack of relevant academic vocabulary and grammar. Thus we developed a method of cultivating and enhancing their academic writing skills.

We consider *the method of forming* particular skills (in our research – academic writing ones) as the system of informational content, relevant classroom management techniques, the sequence of cognitive and transformative interactions undertaken within particular stages.

The Essence of the Suggested Technique

The implementation of the proposed program was based on the technology of problem learning with the feedback approach. Thus, we used various kinds of classroom management activities that directly correspond to the main management teaching functions. Thus, at the planning stage while designing the method of developing and enhancing PhD students' academic writing skills we mainly turned to "The Research Guide" introduced by the scholars of the University of Southern California and "Study skills in English" developed by R. R. Jourdan [2]. This method comprises two blocks: *the content component* and *the activity component* which can be easily integrated as additional material to the academic discipline "Foreign Language for Academic Purposes" which is one of the core disciplines of Postgraduate

training at Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman.

The main objective of our method is to get acquainted PhD students who are future scholars with major style, structure and vocabulary requirements for academic writing. Let us analyze each of the components.

So *the content component* (semantic one) includes the overall information about writing academic articles, abstracts, summaries and essays, thesis and dissertation. As they relate to a style expression that researchers use to define the intellectual boundaries of their studies and specific areas of expertise they are supposed to be aware of the required and relevant connectives of a piece of writing such as: introduction with supportive information, the main development of the article with opposite and alternative arguments and consequent conclusion [2].

Concerning the Academic writing style we pointed out the core characteristics of academic writing, namely: a formal tone, use of the third-person rather than first-person perspective (as a rule), coherence, a logically organized flow of ideas; obligatory existence of narrative links between sentences and paragraphs, a clear focus on the research problem under investigation and precise word choice, use of Past tenses revealing the results and research finding.

In order to learn how to structurize a piece of academic writing of any kind into relevant paragraphs and avoid repetitions, PhD students practiced putting the suggested sentences into the correct coherent order. They also did transformation sentences exercises using grammar forms (Passive voice structures, Suppositional mood and Tense forms) so that they would diversify their grammar structures in academic papers.

During our training practice we paid especial attention to the relevance of the academic vocabulary. Therefore, we emphasized that it is important that they use unambiguous language, be concise, formal, and express precisely what they want it to mean. We selected and arranged appropriate tasks which enabled our PhD students to make well-structured paragraphs and clear topic sentences [2].

In order to develop and enhance these skills we offered our PhD students to practice doing exercises for using Connectives of Results (“*We achieved success / so / therefore / as a result / accordingly / consequently / thus / hence we ...*”); Connectives of Reformulation (“*The company penetrated the foreign market. In other word / To put it in another way / In other words / To put it more simply, it ...*”); Connectives of Concession (“*The results of product testing were promising. However / Nevertheless / Nonetheless / Yet / In spite of that, we ...*”). They also mastered embedding intensifying adverbs + adjectives (participial II) collocations in the abstracts to their articles of specific area of expertise, which are also attributive for academic writing (*comparatively / relatively / precisely / primarily / ultimately / considerably / undeniably etc. + small / important / relevant / developed / investigated / caused / found etc.*) [2].

In our course we introduced such vocabulary and grammar issues aimed at mastering academic writing skills as: Phrasal verbs in academic English (*put forward ideas, opinion, theory / carry out an experiment, research / make up point out go against / go through*); adjectives + nouns (*considerable / heated debate / fundamental, decisive, crucial elements / conflicting, preliminary, encouraging results / in absolute / relative / practical terms etc.*); verbs + the words they combine (*to base mainly / partially / loosely on research / theory / hypothesis; associate commonly / generally / invariably with idea / theory / term; establish conclusively connection / relationships; identify closely causes / issues approaches etc.*); fixed expressions (*a wide range of, with respect to, for the purpose of, in the case of, as regards, in more detail etc.*); vocabulary describing graphs and diagrams (*to decline, increase, plummet, bring down, drop, decrease etc.*); set expressions related to revealing statistics (*standard deviation, extremes, halfway point, variable outcomes, probability distribution, at random etc.*); vocabulary related to evidence, facts and data (*a piece of evidence, look for/ collect examine / consider facts / evidence; flimsy evidence, elicit information, abundant evidence etc.*); key verbs (*to investigate, involve, assume, identify, attempt, affect etc.*) and other relevant issues [2].

Improving the discussed skills our PhD students were engaged in a variety of tasks: completing statements, summarizing sentences, embedding relevant vocabulary, paraphrasing statements, correcting mistakes, editing the suggested statements to make them academic, making extended definitions (*it implies, describes, is defined as, is concerned with, relates to, involves etc.*). They also got acquainted with different ways of exemplification, classification, comparison and contrast, cause and effect (*because of, results in, caused by etc.*), generalization, qualification and caution [2].

In educating PhD students we drew their attention to the importance of making presentations of their research work. Thus, we introduced the vocabulary expressions: “*It’s an honor to have an opportunity to address such a distinguished audience. Let me start with saying some words about my background. The subject of my talk is The purpose of my presentation is Thus I have divided my presentation into So ...*” and other samples.

Learning a variety of synonyms we encouraged our PhD students know how to approach a research problem with some basic idea of what position they would like to take and what grounds they would like to stand upon. We encouraged them to read additional literature and extend, modify and refine their own positions in light of the ideas proposed by others picking up relevant vocabulary and expressions [1].

The implementation of our method took place through the introduction of specially designed and selected tasks and organizational forms in the learning process, in other words classroom management techniques or the *activity component* of our method. Tasks were divided into the following blocks: the task of identifying the nature of the text (scanning an

article or abstract and highlighting its main idea, characteristics, criteria; making a plan of the article, abstracts, annotation); forms of activity organization (individual / group work with primary sources, preparation of speeches); feedback (oral presentation of thesis, writing an article in the specific area of expertise, summarizing other pieces of academic writing and writing an academic essay). Let us look through some of them.

At the correction stage, our PhD students' awareness of the subject issues was checked through such a task as "Background knowledge probe" — students were asked to identify the lexical units used in the academic style of writing articles.

At the control stage we involved our PhD students in completing the following tasks: "concept mapping" — creating a "roadmap" when analyzing academic papers through key concepts, terms and notions; "Tabloid titles" - writing a single sentence / statement expressing the concept of a piece of academic writing; "Objective check" — writing expectation of the concept (message or gist) of a piece of academic writing from studying only a title of the article; "Harvesting" — a reflexive type of activity targeted at receiving feedback. PhD students were asked to read some scientific articles and pick up the lexical units that reproduce the main idea in each paragraph. "Chunk knowledge" activity implies arranging all the knowledge acquired in the learning process, the main lexical words: nouns, verbs, adjectives in a certain picture; "Split page" means correlating key concepts (phrases) with the corresponding explanation.

With the purpose of developing our PhD students' analytical thinking skills with consequent translating them into academic writing ones we involved them into a variety of creative tasks. One of them implies giving PhD students a particular topic to write about (e. g.: "The development of the agricultural sector of Ukraine at the beginning of the 21-st century") and they are asked to identify key concepts and terms making up this topic statements (focusing on identifying proper nouns, nouns or noun phrases, and action verbs in the assignment description). Then they have to sum up their ideas into a short summary (up to 50 words) expressing the main issues they are going to introduce in the article or abstract using relevant vocabulary and grammar. Using the main concept terms and synonyms they managed to refine and frame the scope of the research problem [1].

We implemented our method within three stages. *At the first stage* (motivation and diagnostic one) we had an objective to boost our PhD students' motivation to develop and enhance their academic writing skills. We achieved this goal by stimulating their interest, outlining their academic and research perspectives and demonstrating vivid examples of oral academic presentations.

At the second stage (practical one) we introduced our program, method and informational support; we mainly provided them with necessary information, vocabulary and practice tasks. We worked with authentic academic

articles, analyzed their content, vocabulary and the way the authors revealed their messages.

At the third final stage (feedback one) we checked our PhD students' awareness and competence. By introducing their pieces of academic writing they demonstrated what skills they acquired.

Research Methods

Participants of our experiment were PhD students (n=50) of the first year of study with experience of learning English for two years. They were divided into two groups: experimental and control ones and were invited to participate in two phases of the experiment.

The first phase adopted a convenient snowball sampling strategy the purpose of which was to get acquainted with the participants. They were asked to complete a short questionnaire to collect education and contextual data including age, years of study, number of years of studying English, percentage grades for recent exams (e.g. IELTS) and gender. According to the collected data the participants from 30 to 50 years old. Nearly all of them (87%) learnt English for two years at the University. None of them have ever taken IELTS or TOEFL exams. 60% of the participants expected to improve their at least writing skills rather than speaking ones (26%). The rest of PhD students (14%) regarded the coming course as a mere subject, just to take an exam.

In the second phase, 25 PhD students (experimental group) were selected to participate in an in-depth study. They were asked to complete an adapted to our requirements language-proficiency paper consisting of reading comprehension, vocabulary understanding (finding synonyms, filling in the gap, completing the sentences) and writing tasks (summarizing, asking questions, concluding etc.) [6, p.8]. Students were trained in how to undertake think-aloud protocols and then asked to think aloud during the tasks. The collected information stated that nearly 90% of the participants failed to complete the vocabulary and writing tasks.

In taking account of the methodological issues on researching ways of enhancing academic writing skills, we attempted in this study to provide a detailed protocol for the collection of the academic writing skills-data. This drew on the work of Li Li and Shirley Larkin (2016) and in terms of data analysis on the work of Yang (2003) and Gu (2014) [6; 5; 12]. The paper-based task comprised 20 tasks and took approximately 80 minutes. Following completion of the paper, students were briefly interviewed with questions based on their expectations in order to explore further their language knowledge and strategy use in completing the paper.

Retrospective interviews were conducted in English and in the students' native language. Special attention was paid to translation in order to ensure accuracy of the data.

In the second phase the participants were asked to complete a motivation questionnaire modified to PhD students which comprised 15 questions and statements concerning their expectations, area of academic expertise and research interests. The collected information helped

us design our course corresponding to PhD students' expectations.

In order to investigate a research problem (what classroom management techniques to use in order to enhance academic writing skills, what vocabulary and grammar to use) we undertook a qualitative method which implies an emphasis on qualities of PhD students' writing skills, their language and meanings that are experimentally examined and measured. In our research we also studied real-classroom situations; understood changes occurred and offered useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest.

We assessed the level of development of acquired academic writing skills in compliance with the designed criteria such as: academic motivation and values, academic vocabulary awareness and grammar accuracy.

We tried to introduce a holistic approach which helped us view the whole phenomenon under study as a complex system that is more than the sum of its parts; the focus is on complex interdependencies and system dy-

namics that cannot be reduced [4].

The experimental group was taught according to the designed experimental technique and the educational process in the control group respondents remained without any changes.

Research Results

According to our findings at the beginning of our experiment PhD students lacked motivation in writing academic abstracts and articles; in experimental groups a low vocational and academic interest and an underdeveloped motivational sphere prevailed (on average, this figure was about 42.7%). Some sustained interest in learning new vocabulary and mastering new academic skills was recorded only for 28.2% of PhD students.

At the control stage of the experiment, the data changed as follows: the largest increase in the number of Ph. D students with stable professional academic interest, positive emotional and value attitude to acquiring new academic vocabulary and skills was recorded in 57.7% of respondents (+28.6 %). The results are introduced in table 1.1.

Table 1.1

Changes in Academic Motivation And Values in EG Respondents (%)

Academic motivation and values	Experimental stage	Control stage
Low	42.7	17.6
Middle	28.2	24.7
High	29.1	57.7

PhD students confessed that their academic interests and motivation to enhancing their academic vocabulary and writing skills had increased at the end of experiment. They were characterized by a polished, harmonious, conscious and formed hierarchy of academic value orientations. They are mainly aimed at acquiring new academic language knowledge, seeking self-perfection and self-fulfillment, aspiration for spiritual enrichment (24.7%). Approximately 57.7% of the respondents expressed interest in academic and professionally oriented values: creativity, increase of professional and academic knowledge, self-confidence, personal and professional development.

According to the results of the questionnaire, we found that 48.5% of students had the power of aspirations, especially the desire to obtain and develop academic writing skills and to succeed in their future research activities.

At the beginning of our investigation we identified a low level of PhD students' awareness of academic vocabulary and relevant writing skills (68.4%). The collected data proved that the majority of PhD students are viewed as less proficient learners who demonstrated different cognitive strategies in completing the writing task. They lack skills in planning, monitoring and evaluating time for writing abstracts. Less skilled writers are prone to start writing immediately after a task was assigned. In the retrospective interviews, they reflected that the primary reason for doing so was a perception of lack of time. They turned out to be unaware how construct sentences, they confessed (78%) that they constructed the abstract in their

native language and then translated it into English. Moreover, they often got frustrated by their lack of appropriate vocabulary expressions of English; thus, it was important for them to focus on language approach and start to write as soon as possible.

From the analysis of the results we can conclude that a significant increase was observed in EG PhD students' mastering academic writing skills (planning, choosing the right vocabulary and grammar structures, style). These students more clearly expressed the ability to independently make managerial decisions taking into account the psychological characteristics of the situation, the ability to analyze their own educational and academic activities, to establish causal relationships, the ability for analytical thinking and rendering messages of their research works in English. They also have learned to plan their presentations and statistical data in English, combine and transfer knowledge and skills to a new situation, master the ability to model academic debate and discussions in English, accumulate and attract new vocabulary and grammar knowledge (after analyzing foreign scholars' research works).

By tracking changes in the levels of academic writing skills in the experimental group, we observed a substantial increase in them (64.2%). Thus, the obtained results indicate the importance of attracting analytical, vocabulary and structural analysis of academic articles. Positive changes in PhD students in experimental groups are also revealed in relation to analytic-reflexive abilities.

Table 1.2.

Changes in Awareness of Academic Vocabulary and Grammar Accuracy in EG Respondents (%)

Academic vocabulary and grammar accuracy	Experimental stage	Control stage
Low	68.4	3.5
Middle	37.5	32,3
High	7.3	64,2

It should be noted that the CG students also took part in the reassessment of the distinguished skills and qualities but there were no dynamics of their development, thus we do not present them.

Thus we sum up that involving future scholars in a variety of academic activities in the process of learning a foreign language at postgraduate training (analyzing content, grammar and vocabulary of academic articles, designing one's own academic abstracts, delivering speeches) can significantly enhance PhD students' academic vocabulary awareness and consequently develop and improve their academic writing skills.

Conclusion

In view of European integration of higher education involving students as well postgraduate ones in a variety

of joint research projects has become an integral part of professional training of future scholars. Consequently they are required to possess relevant competences. In the process of postgraduate training it is extremely important to focus on mastering academic writing skills through implementing different approaches. In connection with this, there is a need for training specialists who would possess a methodological culture (knowledge of certain methodological norms and rules of scientific knowledge, the ability to apply them in the process of solving tasks). Thus, the suggested approach has proved its efficiency.

Scientifically oriented activities of postgraduate students promoted their attachment and development of professional inclination, the ability to reasonably argue their points of view and involvement in scholarly work.

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Наталія Миколаївна Александрова,

кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент кафедри іноземних мов та міжкультурної комунікації,

Лариса Олександрівна Случайна,

кандидат політичних наук, доцент кафедри іноземних мов та міжкультурної комунікації,

Київський національний економічний університет імені Вадима Гетьмана,

54/1 Проспект Перемоги, м. Київ, Україна

ФОРМУВАННЯ НАВИЧОК АКАДЕМІЧНОГО ПИСЬМА В АСПІРАНТІВ У ПРОЦЕСІ ВИВЧЕННЯ ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ

Мета статті полягає в обґрунтуванні методики формування навичок академічного письма, яка передбачає етапи формування, включає в себе змістовий та функціональний компоненти, а також відповідні організаційні форми і методи взаємодії викладача та аспірантів у процесі вивчення іноземної мови. На початковому та завершальному етапах перевірки ефективності впровадження розробленої методики використовувалися авторські діагностичні методики, опитувальники, які спрямовані на виявлення ціннісних орієнтацій та мотивів вивчення основ академічного письма, початковий та здобутий у процесі вивчення дисципліни рівні знань з мови (англійської) у аспірантів. Оцінювання результатів відбулося за відповідними критеріями (ціннісні орієнтації та мотиви, знання академічного вокабуляру і граматична точність) та показниками (мотиви, словниковий запас, лексична обізнаність аспірантів, граматична обізнаність, вміння академічного письма). За результатами дослідження з'ясувалося, що у переважній більшості опитаних аспірантів бракує відповідних знань та вмінь академічного письма. У результаті доведено ефективність впровадження розробленої методики і встановлено якісні зміни в здобутих аспірантами знаннях та вміннях академічного письма. Аспіранти навчилися писати англійською мовою анотації до статей, власні роботи іноземною мовою, а також удосконалили навички будувати власних висловлювань на академічні теми.

Ключові слова: аспіранти, навички академічного письма, дослідницька робота, методика формування вмінь академічного письма, академічний стиль.

Reviewed by Doctor of Pedagogy O. Lohodynskyi

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