

A University Based Case Study: The Research on the Overall Situation and Influencing Factors of Non-English Major Postgraduates' Learning Engagement

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Abstract: This research investigates non-English major postgraduates' learning engagement in academic English by using learning engagement scale. According to previous research and characteristics of academic English learning, by classroom observation, questionnaire and interview method, this research aims to reveal the overall situation of non-English major postgraduates' learning engagement in academic English, and explore the main factors affecting non-English major postgraduates' learning engagement in academic English.

Keywords: Non-English major postgraduates; Academic English; Learning engagement

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1. Introduction

Academic English is closely related to the scientific research ability of non-English major postgraduates, which affects the quality of non-English major postgraduates' training. In order to ensure the quality of postgraduate education, academic English training for non-English major postgraduates should be gradually emphasized as a breakthrough in the quality of learning. Good academic ability can help students develop their comprehensive qualities. Some scholars believed that in the context of the current information society, the academic English ability of master students was an important indicator of their academic ability [1,2].

According to previous study on postgraduates' learning engagement, the author researches on non-English major postgraduate academic English from the perspectives of learning engagement. It is an empirical study with the group of non-English major postgraduates. Exploring the overall situation of academic English learning engagement of non-English major postgraduates can better help non-English major postgraduates to strengthen their learning engagement, and ultimately improve their independent learning ability, as well as provide relevant references academic English teachers and teaching management department to scientifically guide non-English major postgraduates' academic English.

Through SPSS24.0 data analysis, academic English learning engagement of non-English major postgraduates is not high. Third, analyzing interviews and classroom observations, it is concluded that factors affect non-English major postgraduates' learning engagement in academic English include individuals' factors and environmental factors. Finally, in view of the problems in academic English

learning engagement of non-English major postgraduates, corresponding suggestions are made to non-English major postgraduates, academic English teachers and teaching management departments.

2. Research questions

- (1) What is the overall situation of non-English major postgraduates' learning engagement in academic English?
- (2) What are the major factors influencing non-English major postgraduates' learning engagement in academic English?

3. Research participants

This research takes the non-English major first-year students of a master's degree as the research sample. Specifically, there are 130 boys, accounting for 64.4% of the total number, and 72 girls, accounting for 35.5% of the total number. There are 92 engineering students, accounting for 45.5% of the total number, 76 science students, accounting for 37.6% of the total number, and liberal arts students 34, accounting for 16.9% of the total number.

4. Research instruments

4.1. Classroom observation

The actual behaviors related to this study would be noted in the observation scales. The author followed the academic English teacher into the classroom to observe the students' learning engagement.

4.2. Questionnaire

According to Professor Yang Lijun on the NSSE-CHINA questionnaire, the validity of the three-dimensional structure of college students' learning engagement was confirmed [3]. This questionnaire data collection is mainly carried out using the Likert five-point scale.

4.3. Semi-structured interview

It randomly selected 6 non-English majors and 2 academic English teachers. According to the results of the interviews, the overall situation and influencing factors of non-English major postgraduates' learning engagement in academic English can be analyzed, and strategies can be put forward to improve non-English major postgraduates' learning engagement and classroom teaching effects.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Overall situation of academic English learning engagement of non-English major postgraduates

In order to clarify the scoring dimensions, the score is divided into four steps, as shown in **Table 1**. The gradient is marked as level one, level two, level three, and level four. The basic principles followed in this study are: the higher the score, the higher the level of engagement; the lower the score, the lower the level of engagement. "Total learning engagement" is represented by the average of the sum of the scores in the three dimensions.

Table 1. The level of learning engagement

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Low	Lower	Higher	High
1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5

Theoretically, the average value is 3 points. Higher than the theoretical average means that students have a better learning engagement. According to calculations, the overall academic English learning engagement value of non-English major postgraduates is 2.98 points, which can indicate that the overall academic English learning engagement of non-English major postgraduates is at a lower level.

5.2. Comparison of three dimensions of academic English learning engagement

The overall descriptive statistics of non-English major postgraduates' learning engagement in academic English are provided below in **Figure 1**. As shown in **Figure 1**, from the perspective of each dimension, cognitive engagement has the highest average mean value ($M=3.05$), which indicates that non-English major postgraduates pay attention to the use of learning strategies in academic English. Conversely, the average mean value of behavioral engagement, which aims at exploring course learning and learning exchange, is the lowest ($M=2.86$). To some extent, it exposes that the specific actions that non-English major postgraduates take in behavioral engagement are less. Besides, mean score of emotional engagement is 3.03. It can reflect that, non-English major postgraduates can actively coordinate the relationship between teachers and students in academic English.

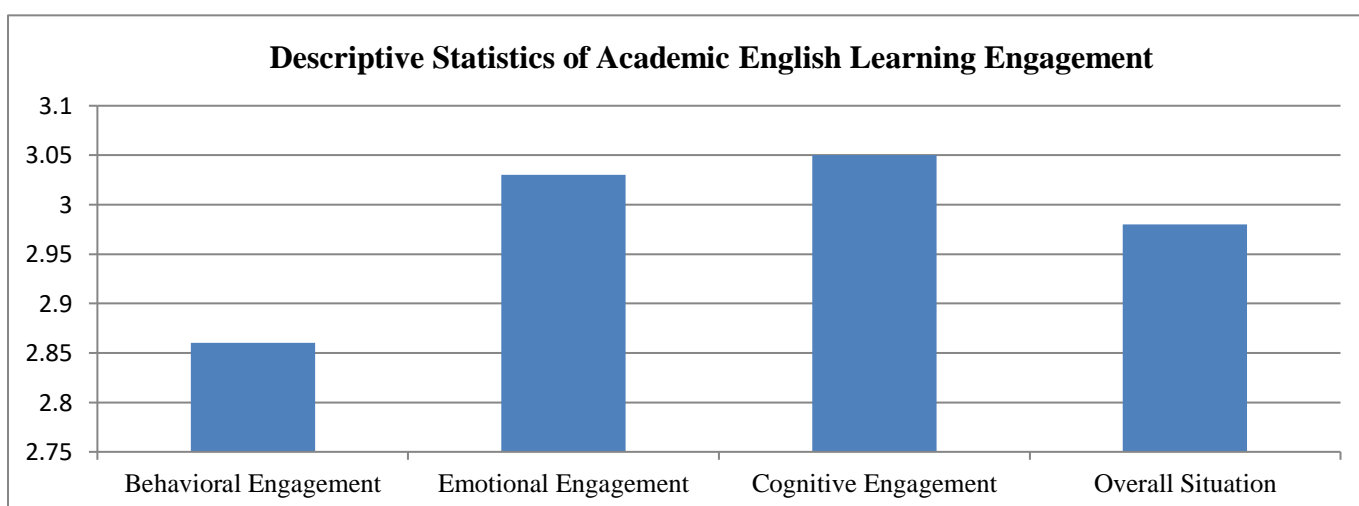


Figure 1. Descriptive statistics of academic English learning engagement

5.2.1. Academic English behavioral engagement

This study investigated the current status of academic English behavioral engagement elements in the form of a Likert 5-point scale, including course learning and learning exchange experiences. As shown in **Table 2**, item A1 “I usually read English literature and participate in academic English activities” had the lowest average value ($M=2.65$), showing that there were few specific measures for non-English major postgraduates to read English literature and participate in academic English activities. Some non-English major postgraduates participated in academic English activities for the purpose of academic conferences and exchanges, which can improve their own scientific research level, and lay the foundation for graduation design and publication of foreign language journals. The average value of item A2 “I will read related academic English literature with my own research questions” had the highest average value ($M=3.14$), showing that non-English major postgraduates had a strong academic English learning purpose. The average value of item A3 “I will carefully preview and consult relevant academic English materials” and A6 item “I will express opinions during academic exchanges” were the same ($M=2.88$). The average value of A4 item “I will actively participate in academic English group discussions” was 2.75. The average value of item A5 “When I meet some aspects of academic English that I do not understand, I will ask my academic

English teachers and classmates for help” was 2.84. Both of item A4 and item A5 were in the lower dimension of behavioral engagement in academic English.

Table 2. Behavioral engagement item characteristics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
A1	202	1	5	2.65	.952
A2	202	1	5	3.14	.995
A3	202	1	5	2.88	.939
A4	202	1	5	2.75	.973
A5	202	1	5	2.84	.949
A6	202	1	5	2.88	.930

5.2.2. Academic English cognitive engagement

Non-English major postgraduates’ cognitive engagement in academic English focused on the use of learning strategies. In terms of cognitive engagement dimensions, as shown in **Table 3**, the average value of the item C3 “I will use organizational strategies in academic English learning” was lower than the average value of cognitive engagement (M=3.05), indicating that in the learning of academic English courses, most of the non-English major postgraduates used less organizational strategies in academic English learning.

The average value of item C1 (“I have a clear purpose for reading English literature and participating in academic English learning activities”) (M=3.21), item C2 (“I will concentrate on reading English literature and read with questions”) (M=3.18) and item C4 (“I will read English literature by using retelling strategy”) were higher than the average value of cognitive engagement (M=3.05). It indicated that non-English major postgraduates focused attention on the literature and concentrate on the reading. The average value of item C5 “I will use fine processing strategies in academic English learning” was 3.04 and item C6 “I will adjust my academic English learning” was 3.00. Non-English major postgraduates paid attention to the process of learning in academic English. They constantly improved their learning methods and reflected on content and characteristics.

Table 3. Cognitive Engagement Item Characteristics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
C1	202	1	5	3.21	.919
C2	202	1	5	3.18	.926
C3	202	1	5	2.64	.937
C4	202	1	5	3.22	.947
C5	202	1	5	3.04	.894
C6	202	1	5	3.00	.911

5.2.3. Academic English emotional engagement

In terms of emotional engagement, item B1 “I enjoy the process of reading English literature and participating in academic English learning activities” had the lowest score (M=2.74) (**Table 4**). According to the author’s interview, first of all, non-English major postgraduates thought that reading English literature was a little boring. Because of their English levels, sometimes they didn’t understand the terminology expression in the literature. The process of reading English literature was long. Non-English

major postgraduates gave up halfway through reading the literature. This also showed that the academic English emotion of first-year non-English major postgraduates had not yet reached the stage of self-consciousness that they were willing to learn academic English. The attractiveness of the English literature reading activity itself was not enough to support master students to complete related literature study tasks. The average value of item B3 “I am very happy to be a member of the academic English group” was higher (M=3.04), indicating that non-English major postgraduates had positive emotional experience in their academic English learning engagement.

Table 4. Emotional Engagement Item Characteristics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
B1	202	1	5	2.74	.994
B2	202	1	5	2.87	.943
B3	202	1	5	3.04	.958
B4	202	1	5	3.00	.972
B5	202	1	5	3.51	.899

5.3. Influencing factors of non-English major postgraduates’ academic English learning engagement

In the academic English learning, students’ learning engagement is affected by many factors. Through classroom observation and interviews, the following is mainly divided into two aspects: individual factors and environmental factors.

5.3.1. Individual factors of non-English major postgraduates

Individual interest had obvious influence on students’ learning engagement in classroom learning. When the learning content or classroom format was consistent with the students’ individual interests, students were more focused and more willing to actively participate in learning activities ^[4].

Academic English learning serves a vital purpose in the graduate education process. The learning goal was obvious, and non-English major postgraduates had pleasant feelings during the academic English learning process. According to the interviews, non-English major graduate students had specific learning objectives in the academic English course. Many non-English major postgraduates were aware of the course’s influence on them. In interviews, the majority of students stated that their present academic English learning was mostly focused on completing teacher-assigned learning activities or writing the final paper. After several of these issues arose, non-English major postgraduates were unable to obtain timely solutions in an academic English course.

The lack of active communication with academic English teachers affected non-English major postgraduates’ learning engagement. The acquisition of knowledge was gradually accumulated in the process of learning. Therefore, academic English learners cannot passively accept knowledge. They had to actively explore and dig knowledge deeply so that the learning achievement would be better.

Language application ability is also an important factor affecting students’ learning engagement. This study took the academic English classroom as the specific situation. Students needed to use English to complete most of the learning tasks such as material reading and cooperative writing. Therefore, in the teaching environment of English as a foreign language in my country, the teaching design of academic English courses should not neglect the training and improvement of general English skills to help students effectively engage in learning activities.

5.3.2. Environmental factors of non-English major postgraduates

Firstly, the product-oriented decision-making learning tasks in academic English teaching had contributed to active learning engagement ^[5]. However, the stylized teaching process would be to a certain extent that affected the degree of student learning engagement. The interview found that in the middle and late semesters the behavior and emotional engagement of students had been weakened, because they were already familiar with the teaching process.

Secondly, the interpersonal interaction in the learning process had an important impact on students' learning engagement. In the process of academic English learning, due to the limited time in class, non-English major postgraduates usually completed learning tasks on their own, lacking of interpersonal interaction. Therefore, they had weak enthusiasm ^[6]. Therefore, when adopting the classroom organization form of group cooperation, teachers need to strengthen the cultivation of students' learning strategies and cooperation strategies. Instructional design can continuously mobilize students' enthusiasm for learning tasks, and adopt organizational forms that promote a good classroom atmosphere. It should also choose a suitable learning platform and build an external environment that triggers learning engagement.

Thirdly, academic English activities were rarely carried out, and the form was relatively simple. Academic English activities were one of the forms of putting theoretical knowledge into academic English practice. It was also one of the important ways to cultivate the practical ability of non-English major postgraduates and improve their academic ability. Therefore, the enthusiasm of student participation in academic English activities was not high.

6. Conclusion

First of all, the descriptive statistics reveal that the overall situation of non-English major postgraduates' study engagement is not high. The mean values of these three dimensions are ranging from 2.86 to 3.05, among which, their cognitive dimension performs best, with a mean score of 3.05. While their behavioral engagement shows the lowest level (Mean=2.86). The results indicate that the non-English-major postgraduates' study engagement needs further improving, especially their behavioral engagement. That's to say, their learning actions still need promoting. Furthermore, certain effective approaches to actively activate learning habits should be taken. Second, learning engagement is influenced by a variety of factors. Individual and environmental elements are also considered in this thesis. On one hand, the learning content or classroom structure should be aligned with the students' individual interests based on individual criteria. Academic English teachers should make every effort to use materials that are relevant to their students' lives and address current issues; on the other hand, academic English teachers should create enriched and engaging learning activities that meet students' cognitive needs in order to encourage students' initiative to participate in learning. Students' excitement for learning activities may be continually mobilized through instructional design, and organizational forms that foster a positive classroom climate can be used.

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