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Original Paper

A Study on Topic Selection and Actualization in English Majors' BA Thesis Based on Self-efficacy Theory

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Abstract

By employing the self-efficacy theory, this study examines the relationship between the degree of self-efficacy in BA thesis composition and English majors' reasons for and problems in topic selection and actualization. The results suggest that students with different degree of self-efficacy in BA thesis composition tend to have different reasons to select certain topic for a BA thesis as well as different problems during the topic selection and actualization process. Students with higher self-efficacy tend to be more active and positive during the process of topic selection and actualization. Pedagogical implications are given to improve the efficiency of academic writing courses and to help teachers and supervisors to better understand students so as to enhance English majors self-efficacy in BA thesis composition as well as better help the students to choose and actualize the topics for their BA theses with more ease.

Keywords

self-efficacy, confidence, BA thesis composition, topic selection and actualization

1. Introduction

According to Foreign Language Teaching in Colleges and Universities Steering Committee (2000), the BA thesis of English major has always remained an important way to examine and evaluate the academic performance of the students. Among the process of BA thesis composition, topic selection is the very first step and probably is the most crucial part of the entire writing process (Tian & Duan, 2006) while the actualization runs through the whole composition process. However, although numerous studies have been done on the topic selection and actualization in BA thesis of English major and great efforts have been made to help the students with their topic selection and actualization, the problems like the improper scale of the topic, lack of creativeness, or lack of significance seem hard to

get rid of. Further research is required to probe into these problems and to provide more practical and useful suggestions to cope with them. This study aims to examine how Chinese English majors' self-efficacy in BA thesis composition affects topic selection and actualization in their BA theses, reveal the reasons of the deep-rooted problems from the perspective of students' self-efficacy in BA thesis composition and hopes to provide some pedagogical suggestions for the academic writing course. In the following parts, research on self-efficacy and L2 writing and the studies about topic selection and actualization in BA thesis writing of Chinese English majors is carefully examined. It is followed by methodology part describing methods the authors used in this research. The next chapter reports the findings of the research and discusses them by applying the self-efficacy theory. Chapter Five concludes this paper by summarizing major findings and defects of this research and providing directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Self-efficacy and L2 Writing

Self-efficacy is the extent or strength of one's beliefs in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals (Ormrod, 2006). It is developed as a construct which stresses the influence of personal expectations on subsequent performances (Bandura, 1977). Since according to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy will affect motivation, persistence, resilience and emotional responses, it is quite natural to see numerous studies conducted to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and L2 writing. Bandura (1977) himself analyzes the intermediary and concluded that self-efficacy toward writing influences on the writing process.

Many other researchers treat self-efficacy as an independent mediator that causes writing apprehension, which in turn affects writing performance. They also contend that writing apprehension is negatively correlated with self-efficacy toward L2 writing and positively correlated with writing performances (Dilek Yavuz Erkan, 2011; Prat-Sala, 2012; Li, Liu, R. D., & Liu, Y., 2013; Run & Zhang, 2015; Ho, 2016). Others regard self-efficacy as one of the most important factors that influences L2 writing strategies. Soo Eun Chae's (2013) analysis of Korean L2 learners shows that self-efficacy toward L2 writing is significantly and positively related with use of different types of writing strategies. Olive N. Gahungu (2007) studying students at university level studying French as their second language and Mimi Estonella Mastan and Nooreiny Maarof's (2013) research reach similar conclusions.

Factors that influence self-efficacy also receive attentions from scholars. After examining grade, gender and learning environment, Qian Haiming (2005) concludes that self-efficacy develops with grade level; Felor Hashemnejad, Masoud Zoghi and Davoud Amini (2014) propose that gender affects self-efficacy after studying EFL students in Makoo and Marand while Pajares (2003) believes previous educational experience is also one of the important factors that affect self-efficacy.

Finally, researchers like Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons (1990) attempt to establish L2 writing self-efficacy scales to test L2 learners' writing performances with an aim to improve their writing abilities. All in all, what these studies have in common are not only a well-acknowledged understanding that self-efficacy is one of the strongest predictor in writing performance (Klassen 2002), but also plenty of insightful pedagogical implications.

Despite of the large amount of studies on self-efficacy's effects on L2 writing, few studies focus especially on academic writing in second language, let alone the ones exclusively on self-efficacy in BA thesis composition, which stands out for its format, writing process and importance for senior undergraduates. For instance, Wu (2021) used three questionnaires and written interviews to explore the writing anxiety and self-efficacy of English major graduates, revealing that self-efficacy significantly impacts writing performance. However, this study did not specifically explore the role of self-efficacy in the topic selection and actualization. Moreover, it investigated the situation among graduate students, instead of undergraduates. Similarly, Zheng and Yao's (2019) research highlighted the importance of guidance in enhancing self-efficacy but did not examine its role in thesis topic selection and actualization. Li (2023) quantitatively studied English undergraduates' thesis writing self-efficacy, identifying key factors like motivation and language skills. However, it also did not focus exclusively on topic selection and actualization.

To sum up, while self-efficacy is widely studied in L2 writing, research specifically focusing on academic writing—especially self-efficacy in BA thesis topic selection and actualization for English majors—remains scarce. Existing studies either address broader writing contexts (e.g., Wu, 2021 on graduate students) or lack focus on topic-related processes (e.g., Zheng & Yao, 2019; Li, 2023). This creates a research gap in understanding how self-efficacy, one affective component that can strongly impact all writing phases (McLeod, 1987), influences the unique challenges of thesis topic selection and implementation for English undergraduates.

2.2 Topic Selection and Actualization of Chinese English Major Undergraduates

Topic selection and actualization in BA thesis composition of Chinese English majors, though important, receive much less attention when compared with research on such as the writing strategies of literature review or how to compose abstract.

Most studies on topic selection and actualization are about current situations, problems and causes to these problems.

Some studies differentiate themselves by choosing smaller division of English majors like English translation majors (Zhang, 2007) or business English majors (Shen, 2016) or English literature majors (Du, 2005). The problems concerning topic selection and actualization in BA thesis composition of Chinese English majors generalized from previous studies are difficulties in narrowing down the topic, lack of creativeness and lack of significance (Shi & Nie, 2017; Zhang, 2020; Yu, 2021; Yang & Yu, 2023).

Some studies discuss the causes for these problems and they can be generally generalized from the perspectives of the students and the supervisors and schools' authorities. For the students' part, most previous studies conclude that students' attitudes toward BA thesis and their incompetence in conducting research and problems with L2 writing lead to the problems in topic selection. For example, after analyzing 43 theses of English majors at a university in the Northwest part of China, Zhao (2015) summarizes that the bad attitudes, lack of training in academic writing and limited time and energy to compose BA thesis because of future plans like job-hunting or applying for graduate studies are common causes to the problems. Wang (2012) also points out that students' emphases on job-hunting and incompetence in academic writing result in the problems. For the supervisors' part, Wang and Xu (2023) conducted a case study on the diversified topic selection of English majors, finding that while students and teachers generally approved of the diversified options, the quality of theses did not significantly improve. The research attributed this to students' insufficient time and energy investment, as well as the need for more meticulous guidance from teachers. Wang (2025) reached a similar conclusion, claiming that students generally lacked in-depth understanding of local culture, and supervision in this regard was insufficient.

Although these studies have shed light on the topic selection and actualization of Chinese English majors from multiple dimensions, there remains a gap in the exploration of psychological factors influencing students' topic selection and actualization. How do psychological factors such as self-efficacy affect students during the topic selection and actualization process? The authors will analyze how self-efficacy in BA thesis composition, a psychological factor, influences Chinese English majors' BA thesis topic selection and actualization.

3. Methodology

The present study aims to explore how does the self-efficacy in BA thesis composition influence Chinese English majors' BA thesis topic selection and actualization by means of a questionnaire.

The research questions are as follows:

(1) What is the status quo of self-efficacy in BA thesis composition of Chinese English majors?

(2) How does the self-efficacy in BA thesis composition influence Chinese English majors' reasons in topic selection and actualization?

(3) How does the self-efficacy in BA thesis composition influence Chinese English majors' problems in topic selection and actualization?

3.1 Participants

187 English majors from China who had finished within the last two years or were composing their BA thesis participated in this research. 98 were female and 91 were male. They were expected to answer the questions based on their experiences of BA thesis composition. 97.9% of them were 18 years old and above. All participants filled in the questionnaire voluntarily through the Internet. The gender and

age distribution of the participants was presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Gender and Age Distribution

Gender and Age						
			age			
			<18	18-22	≥23	Total
gender	male	Count	2	47	42	91
		% of Total	1.1%	24.9%	22.2%	48.1%
	female	Count	2	58	38	98
		% of Total	1.1%	30.7%	20.1%	51.9%
Total		Count	4	105	80	189
		% of Total	2.1%	55.6%	42.3%	100.0%

3.2 Instruments

The questionnaire employed in this study was composed of three parts. The first part collected the basic information of the participants. The first question was aimed at filtering out some invalid questionnaires, namely, those that were filled in by participants who reported themselves as non-English majors but completed the questionnaire by mistake. The second and the third questions were about the gender and age of the participants. Questions four to nine examined the individual participant's perceptions on BA thesis and their academic writing course experiences if they had experienced.

The second part was about the status quo of topic selection and actualization of BA thesis of English majors in China. It consisted of four questions. Questions 10 to 13 investigated when they were asked to choose the topic and why the participants chose certain topic and what problems they met when selecting and actualizing their research topics respectively. All options of these two questions were based on previous studies on BA thesis writing. The participants were allowed to add other reasons, problems and the methods to solve the problems if they wanted. The writers examined these five items to find out how the time to choose the topic, reasons and the problems of topic selection and actualization related with self-efficacy in BA thesis writing, which was the subject of the next part of the questionnaire.

The third part, titled as BA thesis writing self-efficacy questionnaire for English major in China, was based on Shell, Murphy and Bruisings's (1989) conception of writing self-efficacy. The writers were inspired by a writing self-efficacy scale questionnaire used by Liao Meikui (2009) in which relevant factors that may influence English writing self-efficacy were taken into consideration. To examine the self-efficacy of English major in the context of BA thesis writing, based on Liao's scale, the authors consulted self-efficacy measurements (Pajare & Valiante, 2000), Bandura's (1995) Children's

Multimensional Self-Efficacy Scales, requirements for BA thesis of English majors of several universities and the book Research Methods and Thesis Writing in Applied Linguistics (Wen, 2023) for the writing requirements of writing the main body of a thesis, which includes introduction, literature review, methodology, theoretical framework, results and discussions, conclusion and abstract. Therefore, the final version of the scale included eleven questions. Questions 14-22 in this part were aimed at investigating participants' self-efficacy in writing tasks of the main body of BA thesis. Questions 23-31 were about self-efficacy in BA thesis writing skills. This part measured the degree of Chinese English majors' self-efficacy in BA thesis writing according to a five-point Likert scale which ranged from 1(I'm totally not certain about it) to 5(I'm totally certain about it). If a participant rates 5, he or she would be regarded as an English major with the highest self-efficacy and vice versa.

3.3 Data Collection

In April, 2025, questionnaires were distributed through the website called "sojump" (www.sojump.com). The writers completely took charge of data collection procedure. In the description part at the beginning of the questionnaire, the authors stressed the importance of the participants' objective reports and they were expected to provide their answers accordingly. 508 questionnaires were collected and 489 were found valid. The quantitative data will be displayed and discussed in next chapter.

3.4 Data Analysis

All the data collected were analyzed by utilizing SPSS Statistics 26.0. In the beginning, the raw data were put into the software for descriptive statistics including percent, mean, standard deviation about self-efficacy. Next, all the participants were classified into high and low self-efficacy according to their scores in the third part of the questionnaire, which was about the BA thesis writing self-efficacy of English majors. A mean score of 3.41 and below was regarded as low self-efficacy while a mean score of 3.94 of and above was considered as high self-efficacy. Such a classification can be justified by the significant difference between the high self-efficacy group and low self-efficacy group ($p=.000<.05$). Thirdly, frequency and percent of different groups were computed to find out whether students with different degree of self-efficacy in BA thesis composition would have different reasons for choosing certain topic and problems in topic selection and actualization in the process of BA thesis composition. Next, independent samples test was performed to examine whether having taken academic courses would influence English majors' self-efficacy in BA thesis composition. Frequency and percent were computed to illustrate the perception toward the helpfulness of academic writing course and toward the helpfulness of teachers' explanations on topic selection and actualization. Box-plots were drawn to show the general relationships between degree of self-efficacy and perceptions on the "helpfulness" of academic writing courses and the teachers' explanation on topic selection and actualization respectively. Finally, line charts were drawn to show how the time issue affects students' self-efficacy in BA thesis composition.

4. Findings and Discussion

In this chapter, the results of the research questions mentioned in the section of methodology will be presented with a quantitative analysis for the statistical data. It includes four sections. The first section reports the description of the self-efficacy in BA thesis composition of Chinese English majors. The second section presents the relationship between different degree of self-efficacy and differences in reasons for topic selection and actualization. The third section illustrates the relationship between different degree of self-efficacy and differences in types of problems of topic selection and actualization. The last section attempts to reveal pedagogical implications and provide some pedagogical suggestions through further analyzing and discussing.

4.1 Self-efficacy in BA Thesis Composition of Chinese English Majors

To answer the first question, the means and deviations of the participants' responses to the third part of the questionnaire were calculated. Table 4.1 below provides the descriptive statistics of the self-efficacy in writing tasks, in writing skills and the overall writing self-efficacy.

Table 4.1. Description of Writing Self-efficacy

	Task Self-efficacy	Skill Self-efficacy	Writing Self-efficacy
Mean	3.50	3.50	3.50
Median	3.67	3.63	3.65
Std. Deviation	.82	.67	.73
Range	4.00	3.63	3.76

In the table, data in section 1 with 8 items show the self-efficacy on writing tasks of BA thesis, the section 2 with 3 items represents self-efficacy in writing skills and the last section represents the general writing self-efficacy in BA thesis.

As the table shows, the average score of writing self-efficacy is 3.50. There seems to be no obvious difference between the mean value of the former two sections. However, the standard deviation for task self-efficacy is the higher (SD=.82), showing that participants feelings toward tasks in BA thesis composition are more divergent than those toward the skills.

On the whole, the results of this part display that English majors have moderate self-efficacy in their BA thesis composition and there is no significant difference between writing skills self-efficacy and writing tasks self-efficacy judging from the mean values. It indicates that English majors are generally equally confident in skills for BA thesis composition than the concrete contents they are supposed to write. These results are consistent with Li (2023), who found that English undergraduates exhibited moderate self-efficacy, with macro-level writing skills trailing micro-level skills. The current study extends this by showing that task self-efficacy demonstrated greater variance than skill self-efficacy, indicating more divergent confidence in handling specific thesis tasks.

4.1.1 Description of Self-efficacy in BA Thesis Writing Task

To give a more detailed picture of the writing self-efficacy part of the questionnaire, the descriptive statistics of self-efficacy in BA thesis writing tasks is presented in Table 4.2. It contains question 16 to question 24 in the form of percent and mean value.

Table 4.2. Descriptive Analysis of Writing Tasks in BA Thesis Composition

		Percent					
	Questions	1(%)	2(%)	3(%)	4(%)	5(%)	Mean
	Item 1	2.1	7.4	21.2	55.0	14.3	3.72
	Item 2	5.8	13.8	32.3	33.9	14.3	3.37
	Item 3	4.2	7.9	18.0	52.9	16.9	3.70
Task	Item 4	19.0	26.5	12.7	34.4	7.4	2.85
part	Item 5	3.7	11.6	24.3	46.6	13.8	3.55
	Item 6	5.3	7.4	28.6	45.0	13.8	3.54
	Item 7	3.7	10.6	22.8	47.6	15.3	3.60
	Item 8	4.8	7.9	27.0	43.4	16.9	3.60
	Item 9	4.8	7.9	28.0	47.6	11.6	3.53

Note: Item 1= I can finish every writing task assigned after the negotiation with my supervisor in time with quality.

Item 2= I can easily select and actualize the topic for my thesis which I am interested in and satisfies my supervisor.

Item 3= I can briefly write the topic, significance and the frame of my thesis.

Item 4= I can sort out, reasonably analyze, conclude and review previous studies and argue for the significance of my own thesis.

Item 5= If needed, I can make a detailed and clear description of my research design.

Item 6= If needed, I can summarize the theoretical framework to be used in my thesis logically.

Item 7= I can briefly and clearly conclude the research findings, and discuss them by applying the theories and expressing my own opinions.

Item 8= I can briefly summarize the research findings and significance of my thesis and suggestions for future research.

Item 9= I can write an abstract of my thesis that effectively captures the essence of it.

For item analysis, the participant who rates 4 or 5 is regarded as one with high writing self-efficacy. In the item analysis, item 1 shows 69.3% participants are quite confident that they can finish their writing task based on the negotiation with their tutors within time limit and with quality. The mean score for item 1 is also the highest compared with the rest. As for separated parts of a thesis, item 3 explains that

69.8 percent English majors (the highest percent in the writing tasks efficacy) are efficacious about the ability to write a good introduction for their BA thesis. Item 7 (findings and discussions) ranks the second highest with 62.9 percent, which is followed by item 5 (methodology) and item 8 (conclusion) with 60.4% and 60.3% respectively who have high a self-efficacy degree. However, in terms of the mean score, item 4 (literature review) reflects relative lower perceived self-efficacy with only 2.85, which is below 3.00. The percent of participants with strong efficacy in this item, which is 41.8%, also illustrates that English majors fear the literature review part most. Interestingly, less than half of the participants are efficacious about their topic selection and actualization (48.2%), which provides a support for the significance of this study.

To sum up, English majors are quite efficacious about the tasks of writing the introduction part and are least confident to write a good literature review. Topic selection and actualization also remain as a headache for more than half of the students. In all, it indicates that the participants have moderate self-efficacy toward BA thesis writing tasks.

4.1.2 Description of Self-efficacy in BA Thesis Writing Skills

For the writing skills part, descriptive statistics about the self-efficacy are also shown in Table 4.3. It contains question 25 to question 33 in the form of percentage, mean and standard deviation.

Table 4.3. Descriptive Analysis of Writing Skills in BA Thesis Composition

		Percent					Mean
	Questions	1(%)	2(%)	3(%)	4(%)	5(5)	
	Item 10	2.1	9.5	25.9	50.8	11.6	3.60
	Item 11	2.6	22.8	29.6	33.9	11.1	3.28
	Item 12	7.9	10.6	24.3	44.4	12.7	3.43
	Item 13	6.9	19.6	34.4	33.9	5.3	3.11
Skill	Item 14	2.1	6.9	25.4	51.3	14.3	3.77
Part	Item 15	4.8	7.4	25.4	46.6	15.9	3.52
	Item 16	4.2	10.6	21.2	43.2	20.6	3.66
	Item 17	1.1	10.1	33.9	49.7	5.3	3.48
	Item 18	2.6	9.5	28.0	45.0	14.8	3.59

Note: Item 10= I can understand the requirements for each part of the BA thesis and conceive ideas quickly.

Item 11= I can find numerous relevant materials to be used in my thesis after the topic is decided.

Item 12= I can write a thesis that integrates a lot of information and many perspectives.

Item 13= I can use effective transitions to achieve coherence between sentences or paragraphs.

Item 14= I can avoid errors in spelling and grammar in my thesis.

Item 15= I can convey my ideas and opinions in my thesis in professional and precise formal written

English.

Item 16= I can use the library and Internet to find information that will help myself develop and support an idea in my thesis.

Item 17= I am sure about that I can master the skills and techniques the teacher taught about BA thesis composition in academic writing courses, if there have been.

Item 18= Quite often I know how to proofread my thesis and can find the solutions quickly after communicating with peers or my supervisor if difficulties emerge.

From the perspective of the mean score, item 14 achieves the highest score with 3.77, and item 13 the lowest (M=3.11). It shows that English majors become less efficacious about the advanced skills like the cohesion within the thesis than the basic skills such as the correctness of the spellings and the grammar. Their confidence in finding resources that is revealed in item 16 is also quite strong (M=3.66). However, when it comes to the writing skills taught in academic writing courses (if they have taken such courses), they become less sure about their capabilities in utilization. Such a feeling is further illustrated in items such as 11, 12 and 13 with lower scores. This phenomenon suggests that English majors are aware of their incapability to use writing skills in BA thesis and their confidence is weaker when it comes to the actual use of specific skills. It can be inferred that English majors have not fully grasped the writing skills in BA thesis composition and their awareness of the incompetency causes this perception. Meanwhile, it seems that English majors are more confident in basic skills showed in items 14 and 15 compared with the more advanced ones in 11, 12 and 13. It can be explained that after four-year study, English majors have confidence to some degree in their second language usage. However, more advanced skills like cohesion which requires more than language usage abilities spark more fear and uncertainty among them. It reveals that the self-efficacy depends on the difficulties of the writing skills required in BA thesis.

4.2 Degree of Self-efficacy and Differences in Reasons for Topic Selection and Actualization

In order to find out whether the reasons for choosing and actualizing the topic of BA thesis are influenced by English majors self-efficacy in BA thesis composition, the distribution of the number and the percent of the reasons chosen by participants with high and low achievers in BA thesis writing self-efficacy test are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4. Frequency and Percent of Reasons

	Frequency		Percent	
reasons	High	Low	High	Low
interest	38	38	61.3%	59.4%
significance	43	20	69.4%	31.3%
academic contribution	25	17	40.3%	26.6%
supervisor’s academic influences	26	19	41.9%	29.7%

lenient supervisor	14	11	22.6%	17.2%
easiness	18	32	29.0%	50.0%
given by supervisor	4	14	6.5%	21.9%
follow the majority	2	1	3.2%	1.6%
else	0	0	0	0

From the table, "interest" is an important factor for the topic selection for both the high achievers and the low achievers. 61.3% high achievers choose this reason while low achievers, 59.4%. It suggests that currently, most English majors prefer to choose a topic that interests them. During the actualization process, they are also more likely to optimize their topic without neglecting their interest. While for the low achievers interest remains as the most crucial factor, for those higher achievers, it seems that more of them value the significance of the topic more with 69.4% of them ticking this reason. In sharp contrast, only 20 participants (31.3%) of the low achievers think that significance counts. It may be due to the fact that participants who are less confident in BA thesis composition are more inclined to consider themselves incompetent to figure out the significance of their topic, no matter whether they are really incompetent or not. With such a state of mind, it is quite normal to find out that half of the lower achievers tend to select a topic that they think is easy, no matter it is truly easy or not. 21.9% low achievers report that the supervisors give them a topic directly while only 6.5% high achievers say so. It can also be explained with the degree of self-efficacy in BA thesis composition. English majors who are less efficacious in thesis composition are more likely to be those who have little idea about what to write or those who are not sure what they are able to write. These two types of students are more likely to swallow whatever their supervisors assign to them without a second thought. Consequently, they are more likely to either ask their supervisors for a topic or totally follow their supervisors suggestions on topic selection and actualization.

As for "academic contribution", about 73.4% low achievers do not expect to have any academic contribution when choosing certain topic for BA thesis. It shows that because of their weak confidence in BA thesis composition, they are easily satisfied by just finishing their BA thesis composition instead of pursuing any greater goal. Interestingly, though there are 13.8% more high achievers who are willing to strive for academic contribution, the total number of this group choosing this reason is still smaller compared with the first two options. It may be due to the fact that reaching the goal of academic contribution is regarded as a difficult task.

As for the results of the supervisor's academic influences and personalities, the differences between these two groups are more obvious in terms of whether the supervisor is influential in certain field (41.9% versa 29.7%). The high degree of self-efficacy in BA thesis composition encourages them to desire more than just finish their theses. They intend to achieve more and such a desire drives them to search for supervisors who they believe are better equipped with knowledge relevant to their topics so

that they can be better guided. Only two among 62 high achievers and one among 64 low achievers report that they choose their topics because the majority choose those topics. Strangely, there is one more participant with higher self-efficacy than that with lower self-efficacy choosing to follow the majority during topic selection. The authors suggest that it can be explained wither by the distribution of this sample or by the samples' size of this research.

To sum up, English majors with high self-efficacy (M≥3.94) have more confidence in themselves during the topic selection and actualization process. They tend to select and actualize their topics based on their judgment on the significance of the topics and their interests. English majors with low self-efficacy (M≤3.14) have less confidence in themselves during the topic selection and actualization process. They tend to choose and actualize their topics according to their judgments on the degree of the difficulty of the topics and their interests. Due to the lack of confidence in BA thesis composition, the low achievers seem to be more reluctant to challenge themselves, more inclined to lower the expectation on themselves and prefer to rely on others, especially supervisors instead of themselves to select and actualize the topic for BA thesis. This aligns with Yang & Yu (2023), who highlighted the influence of environmental factors and supervisory guidance on topic selection agency. The current study operationalizes this by showing that high self-efficacy students prioritized topic significance (69.4%), whereas low self-efficacy students relied on supervisors for topic assignment (21.9%, Table 4.4), illustrating how self-efficacy mediates agency in topic decision-making. The differences in reasons in topic selection and actualization do vary according to different degree of self-efficacy in BA thesis composition. In other words, English majors with different degree of self-efficacy in BA thesis composition choose their topics based on somewhat different reasons. Although this study focuses on undergraduates, the conclusion that self-efficacy influences writing-related decisions (e.g., topic selection based on perceived difficulty) corroborates Wu's (2021) assertion that self-efficacy acts as a key predictor of academic behavior.

4.3 Degree of Self-efficacy and Differences in Types of Problems of Topic Selection and Actualization

In order to find out whether the types of problems in choosing and actualizing the topic of BA thesis are affected by English majors self-efficacy in BA thesis composition, the distribution of the frequency and the percent of the problems chosen by participants with high and low achievers in BA thesis writing self-efficacy test are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5. Frequency and Percent of Problems

	Frequency		Percent	
Problems	High	Low	High	Low
too broad	25	29	40.3%	45.3%
too narrow	21	14	33.9%	21.9%
no significance	15	17	24.2%	26.6%

not creative	32	42	51.6%	65.6%
inappropriate theoretical framework	36	37	58.1%	57.8%
no clue at all	6	14	9.7%	21.0%
else	0	0	0	0

According to the table above, lack of creativity and wrong choices of the theoretical framework are the two most cited problems for English majors in their topic selection and actualization process. The high achievers are slightly more likely to choose an inappropriate framework for their theses when trying to select and actualize their topics. The situation concerning theoretical framework is nothing better in low self-efficacy group either. The reason may lie in the fact that participants in both groups have not fully understood the theories they intend to use. Several participants including both high and low achievers with whom the authors have communicated after filling out the questionnaire also mention that due to the time limit, lack of interest and incapability of understanding the treatises depicting theories, they actually haven't read the original books relevant to the theories except for several papers that contain them. But for the lower achievers, the biggest problem is about innovation and creation. 42 out of 64 participants have mentioned that their topics have been criticized for lack of innovation. The low self-efficacy in BA thesis composition has actually lowered their expectations on themselves about their own thesis as well as the topic selection and actualization. They are afraid to step out of the comfort zone, prefer to follow what have been said and done in terms of the BA thesis by imitating previous studies, including topic selection and actualization. The third most common problem according to the table above that both groups suffer is about the scope of the topic: the topic is too broad. Actually, this problem has been reported as one of the biggest problems in BA thesis writing in all fields of subject and numerous previous studies have also reported such a problem. For English majors, according to the table above, 40.3 percent high achievers and 45.3 percent low achievers have experienced this problem. The difference is not that obvious (5%) when compared with the difference in the "too narrow" option (12%). 33.9% participants with high self-efficacy have been criticized for choosing a too narrow topic while only 21.9% participants with low self-efficacy do. The high achievers' strong confidence in BA thesis composition may have led them to be stricter with themselves since they have more expectations on themselves. Meanwhile, they are quite aware of the requirements of topic selection and understand that the "too broad" problem is one of the most common problem for topic selection and actualization either through their observation or in academic writing courses. They have become sometimes so cautious in topic selection and actualization that the topic is excessively narrowed down. The slight difference in "no significance" option suggests that achieving significance is a headache for both groups though the proportions are not high in either group (24.2% for higher achievers and 26.6% for lower achievers). However, 21.0% participants with low self-efficacy in BA thesis composition report that their problem is having no clue at all. They do not know what could be

and should be their topic, let alone how to actualize their topic. This figure is in sharp contrast with participants with high self-efficacy in BA thesis writing (9.7%). Due to the low self-efficacy, it is likely that these participants do not believe in themselves that they can finish their BA thesis with quality so that they are more likely to be reluctant to think up a good topic. Instead, they are the students who are most likely to implore their supervisors to give them a topic than trust themselves and ask their supervisors just for suggestions. This finding validates Yu (2021), who documented low innovation and high topic repetition in theses. The current study provides a psychological mechanism for this phenomenon: 65.6% of low self-efficacy students reported unoriginal topics (Table 4.5), suggesting that self-efficacy deficits contribute to risk-averse topic selection behaviors.

To sum up, the most common problems for English majors with either high self-efficacy ($M \geq 3.94$) or low self-efficacy ($M \leq 3.14$) tend to commit in topic selection and actualization are "using an inappropriate theoretical framework", "having no originality" and "being too broad". Differences lie in which type is the most common type for either group. The most common problem for English majors with high self-efficacy in BA thesis composition concerns the choice of the theory while for the persons with low self-efficacy, it is having no originality and innovation. There is also a huge difference in terms of whether they have any clue about the topic: far more low achievers suffer from lack of ideas. Because of lacking confidence in BA thesis composition, the low achievers seem to be more reluctant and prefer to rely on others, especially their supervisors to cope with the difficulties in topic selection and actualization. The differences in the types of problems in topic selection and actualization do vary according to different degrees of self-efficacy in BA thesis composition. In other words, English majors with different degrees of self-efficacy in BA thesis composition have different types of problems in topic selection and actualization.

4.4 Pedagogical Implications

Based on the analysis from above, English majors with different degrees of self-efficacy have different inclination in terms of the reasons for selecting and actualizing their topic and problems that may emerge. It seems that English majors with high self-efficacy are more willing to take risks during the topic phrase in BA thesis composition, to find solutions to problems, and to expect more from themselves in order to select and optimize the topic to the extent that satisfies both their supervisors and themselves. In other words, students with high self-efficacy in BA thesis composition seem to have a more positive attitude in the face of the topic selection and actualization task. These findings strengthen Bandura's (1986) claim that self-efficacy plays an influential role in human agency. They are also in line with previous studies that have proved that self-efficacy is an essential elements of motivation and behavior (Pajares, 1995; Schunk, 1991). Therefore, it is quite crucial to improve English majors' self-efficacy in BA thesis composition so as to advance their abilities to select and actualize the topic of BA thesis.

First of all, English majors' opinions should be valued. English majors with difference degrees of self-efficacy tend to have different reasons to select a topic and encounter different problems. If teachers of the academic writing course understand individual students' hopes and fears well, they can not only better design their courses, but also provide specific assistance as well as encouragements to improve the quality of the topic in students' BA theses. If the supervisors are clear about students strengths and weaknesses, they can better supervise the students and help them more effectively during the process of topic selection and actualization mentally and practically. Hence, it is advisable to promote effective communications among teachers and students so as to let teachers and supervisors know how students actually feel toward BA thesis composition and the topic selection and actualization process.

To examine whether having taken academic writing courses will influence English majors' self-efficacy in BA thesis composition, independent samples test was performed and the results are presented below in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6. Academic Writing Course Experience

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
taken	148	3.58	0.72	1.06	4.82			
not taken	41	3.19	0.68	1.35	4.29	3.051	187	0.003

According to the statistics shown in the Table 4-6, there is a significant difference in self-efficacy between two groups (sig.=0.003). It reveals that academic writing course experiences do influence students' confidence in their BA thesis composition, which in turn, affects the process of topic selection and actualization. The mean values also suggest that English majors who have taken the academic writing course are more confident in BA thesis composition. Therefore, practical steps in terms of the academic writing courses should be taken: it is quite necessary to set the academic writing course as a compulsory course for all English majors in China in order to improve students' self-efficacy in BA thesis composition. This is the second suggestion.

However, judging from the table, though the highest score of the "taken" group is higher than the "not taken" group, the lowest score for the first group is even lower than the second group. Table 4.7 below shows students' perception toward the helpfulness of the academic writing courses. Among 148 participants who claim they have taken such courses, less than half of the participants think academic writing courses have helped them a lot in the BA thesis composition while the rest think not.

Table 4.7. Perception toward the Helpfulness of Academic Writing Course

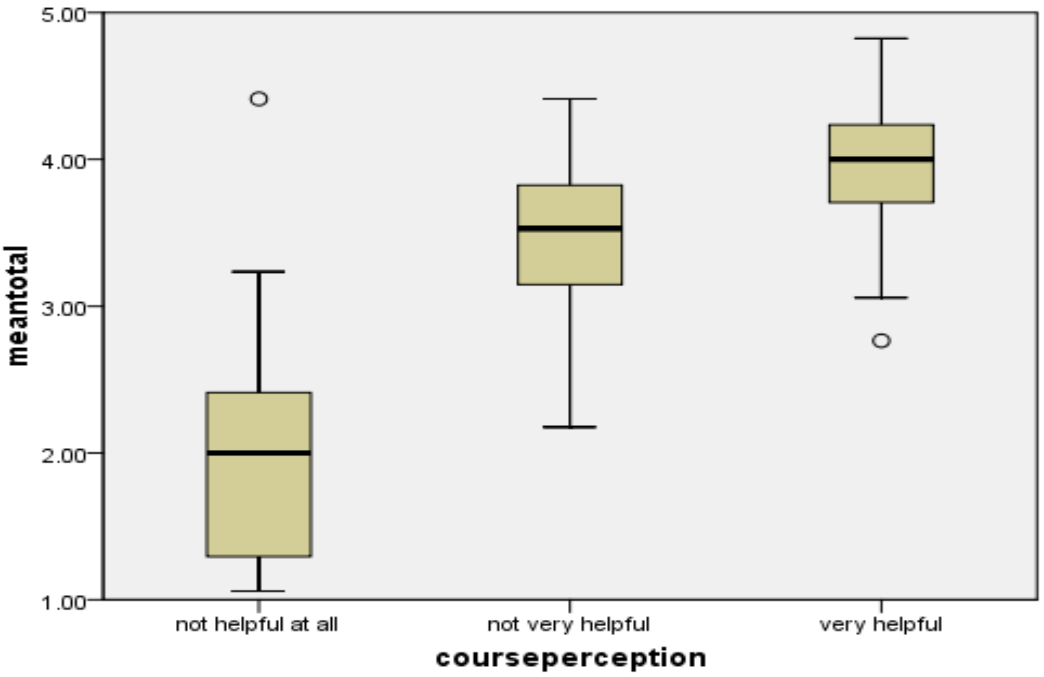
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
very helpful	68	45.9	45.9	45.9
not very helpful	68	45.9	45.9	91.9
not helpful at all	12	8.1	8.1	100.0
Total	148	100.0	100.0	

When it comes to the assistance of the courses to the topic selection and actualization, as suggested in Table 4.8, 60.1% participants do not think that they have benefited a lot from teachers' explanations on topic selection and actualization.

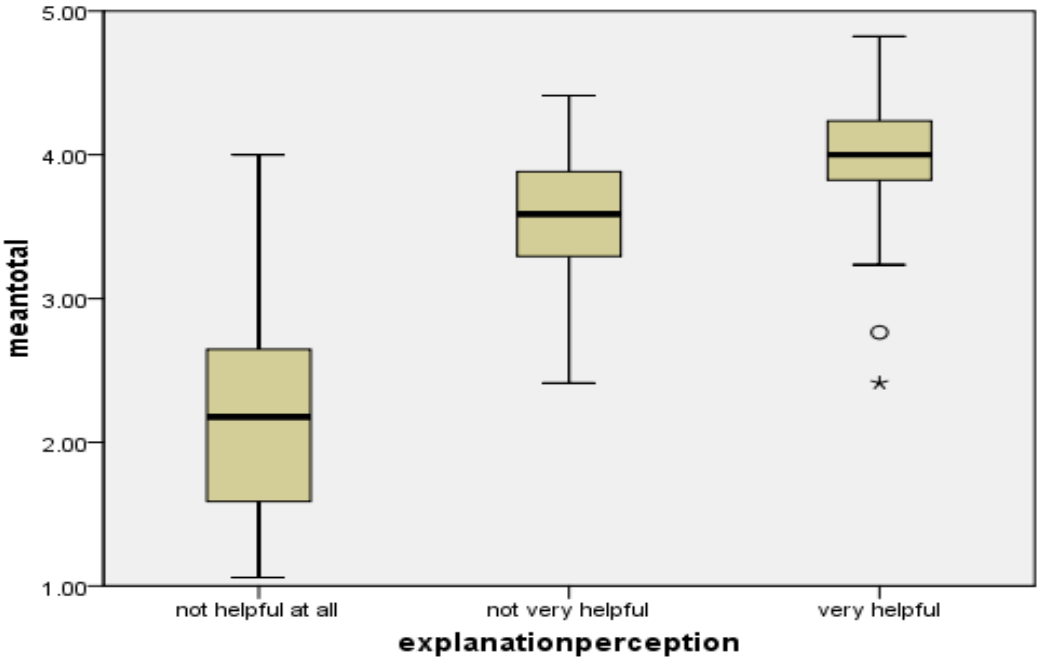
Table 4.8. Perception toward the Helpfulness of Teacher's Explanation on Topic Selection and Actualization

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
very helpful	59	39.9	39.9	39.9
not very helpful	73	49.3	49.3	89.2
not helpful at all	16	10.8	10.8	100.0
Total	148	100.0	100.0	

The Graph 4.9 and Graph 4.10 below show the general relationships between degree of self-efficacy and perceptions on the "helpfulness" of the academic writing courses and the teachers' explanation on topic selection and actualization respectively. Both of the graphs show that there is a general tendency: the more positive the participants feel toward the helpfulness of the courses and teachers' explanation, the higher their self-efficacy in BA thesis composition is. Therefore, it is definitely not enough just to provide students with academic writing courses. There should be some changes in the design of the courses in accordance with students' needs so as to make them feel more positive toward the courses and teachers' explanations on topic selection and actualization.



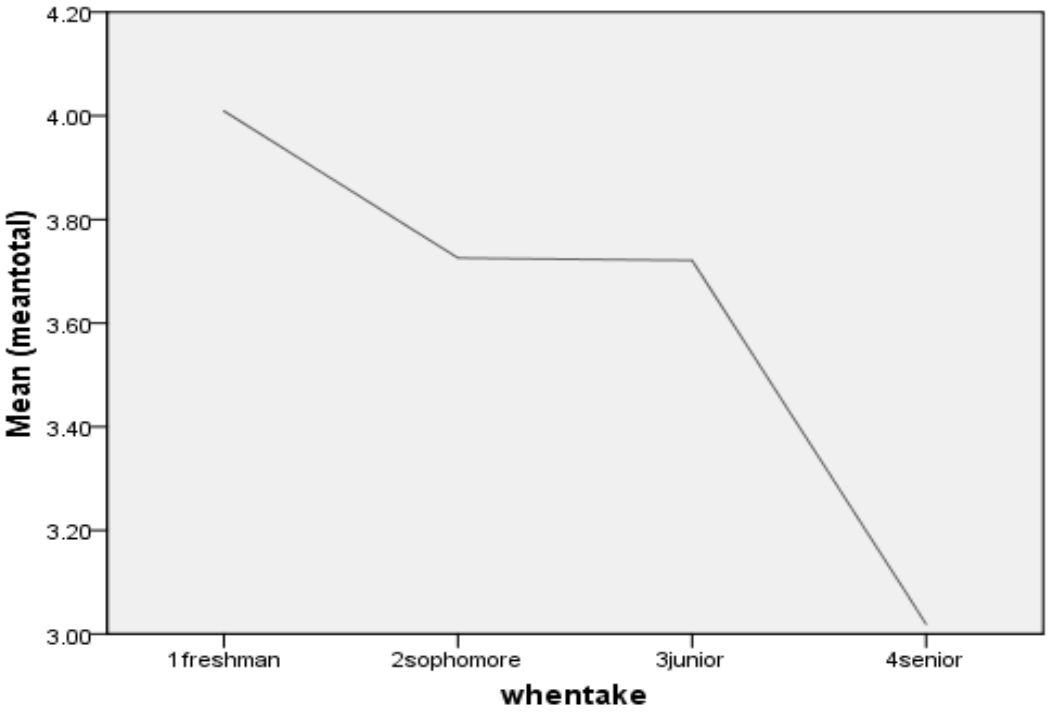
Graph 4.9. Perception on Course and Self-efficacy



Graph 4.10. Perception on Explanation and Self-efficacy

"When to give the academic writing course" is examined in this research. The mean value of each group divided according to when the participants take the courses have been computed and Line Chart 4.11 is presented here to illustrate how the time issue affects students' self-efficacy in BA thesis

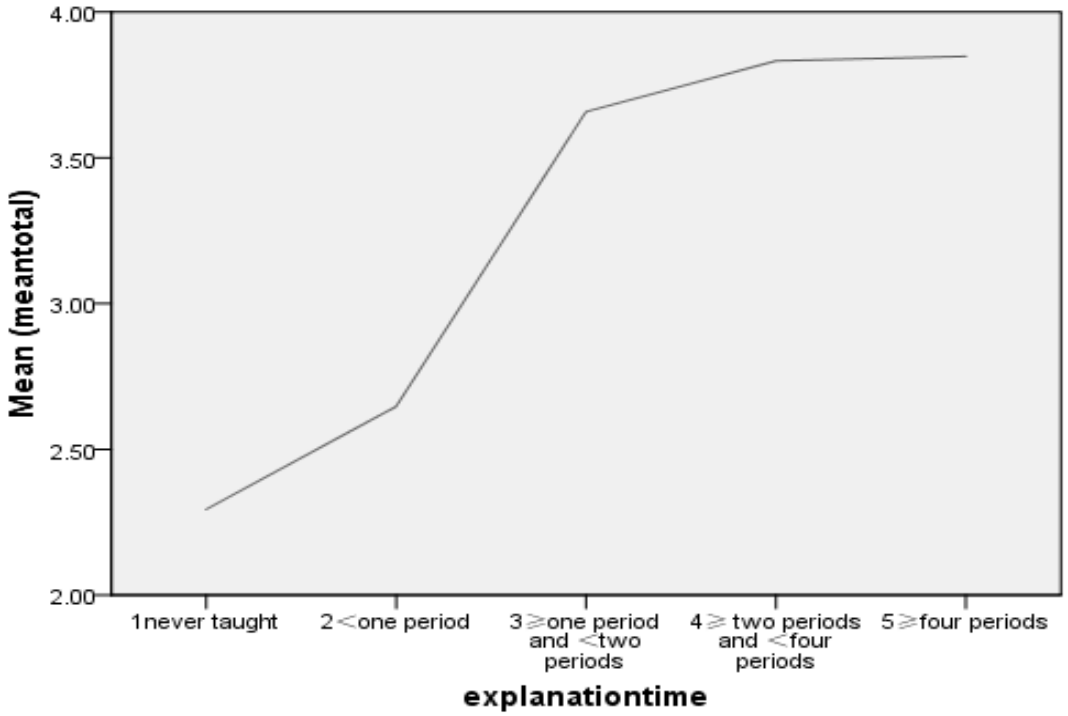
composition. From the chart, it can be inferred that generally, the earlier the course is taken, the higher the self-efficacy will be. It is understandable since the earlier the students take the courses, the more the time they will have to spend on digesting what they have learned in class and the earlier the academic writing awareness will be established. They are allowed to take their time to become well-prepared for the BA thesis composition. In contrast, those who take their courses during the last year are more likely to be less confident. They know they are green hands in the face of BA thesis. Meanwhile, the busy schedules of the last year in college leave them with little time to digest the knowledge they acquire from the academic writing courses. In other words, they are more likely to be less well-prepared for the BA thesis composition compared with students in the first group. Therefore, it is advisable to provide the academic writing courses as early as possible. This is the third suggestion.



Line Chart 4.11. Time to Take Courses and Self-efficacy

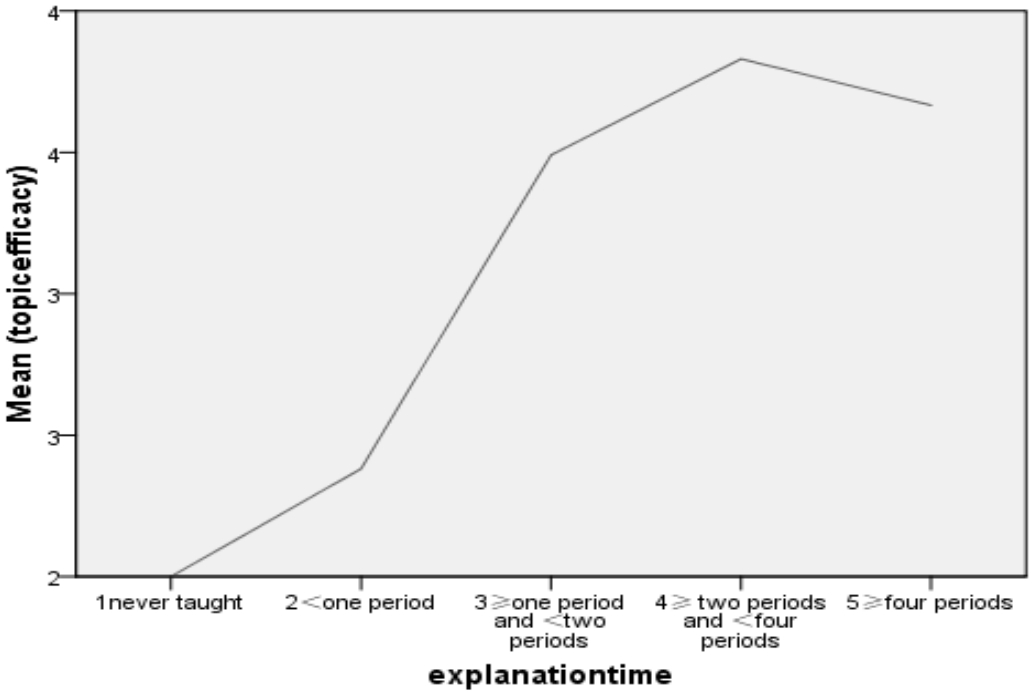
To find out whether the time length of teachers' explanation on topic selection and actualization will affect English majors' self-efficacy in BA thesis composition on the whole, Line chart 4.12 is presented below. From the chart, it is quite clear that there is a huge difference between the second group and the third group. In other words, students feel much more confident in BA thesis writing if teachers spend more than one class period in explaining topic selection and actualization than spend less than one period. After passing the point of "two periods", the increase rate of the mean score slows down and the rate of growth further declines as the time length increases. It suggests that teachers should spend at

least one period on topic selection and actualization in order to ensure a moderate degree of self-efficacy in BA thesis composition. It seems to be quite understandable that the more the time is spent, the clear the picture will be.



Line Chart 4.12. Mean Score and Explanation Time

However, if the time length of explanation and the mean score of self-efficacy in topic selection and actualization(the second question in the third part of the questionnaire) is solely examined, another picture reveals itself as shown in Line Chart 4.13.



Line Chart 4.13. Explanation Time and Mean Score of Self-efficacy in Topic Selection and Actualization

From the line chart, it can be concluded that students' self-efficacy in topic selection and actualization peaks when teachers spend two periods to four periods on this particular process. After that, the degree of self-efficacy falls down. A possible explanation for this lie in the fact that lingering too long on one point may discourage the students' in terms of the teachers' ability to convey their meanings clear and concise. Nevertheless, further research is needed to testify it. For now, a combination of these two charts suggests that it will be better to set the class period on the session of topic selection and actualization at two to four periods. This is the fourth suggestions.

To sum up, four pedagogical suggestions are given in the section combined with graphs and explanations.

First, since English majors with difference degree of self-efficacy tend to have different reasons to select a topic and encounter different problems, their opinions and feelings are deserved to be valued during the topic selection and actualization process. In this way, both teachers of academic writing courses and supervisors can understand individual students' hopes and fears, strengths and weakness so that courses will be better designed and specific assistance as well as encouragements can be provided accordingly to improve the quality of the topic in BA thesis.

Second, since English majors who have taken the academic writing course are more confident in BA thesis composition. It is quite necessary to set the academic writing course as a compulsory course for

all English majors in China in order to improve students' self-efficacy in BA thesis composition which in turn, improve the efficiency of topic selection and actualization.

Third, since the earlier the course is taken, the higher the self-efficacy will be, it is advisable to advance the time to attend academic writing courses as early as possible.

Fourth, since judging from the line chart, students' self-efficacy in topic selection and actualization peaks when teachers spend two periods to four periods on this particular process, it is better set the class period on the session of topic selection and actualization at two to four periods.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals the self-efficacy in BA thesis composition, which is one of the psychological factors, affects English majors' behaviors of topic selection and actualization and can help the supervisors and course designers to put more emphasis on students' self-efficacy in BA thesis composition when helping students with their topic selection and actualization. The majors findings, limitations of this study and future suggestions are presented below.

5.1 Major Findings

Detailed analyses of quantitative research yields the final findings as follows:

Firstly, on the whole, English majors in China have moderate self-efficacy in their BA thesis composition. They are more confident with the skills for BA thesis composition than the concrete contents they are supposed to write. Distinctions remain among tasks to compose different parts of a thesis. English majors are quite efficacious on the tasks of writing the introduction part and are least confident to write a good literature review. Topic selection and actualization also serve as a headache for more than half of the students. As for the writing skills, the self-efficacy depends on the difficulties of the writing skills required in BA thesis. The more advanced the skills are, the less confident the students become.

Secondly, English majors with different degrees of self-efficacy in BA thesis composition choose their topics based on different reasons. Those with high self-efficacy honor the significance of the topics and their own interests while those with low self-efficacy prefer easier topics but still never ignore their own interests.

Thirdly, similarities and differences coexist in terms of the problems which are likely to emerge among English majors with different degrees of self-efficacy in BA thesis composition. The most common mistakes that all students are likely to commit in topic selection and actualization are "using an inappropriate theoretical framework", "having no originality" and "being too broad". English majors with high self-efficacy in BA thesis composition are most likely to choose an improper theory when choosing and actualizing their topics while those with low self-efficacy lack originality and innovation quite often when choosing and actualizing their topics. The latter are also more likely to have no ideas about their topics.

Fourthly, analyses of the differences in reasons and problems reveal that English majors with high self-efficacy in BA thesis composition have a more positive attitude during the topic selection and actualization process. They are more willing to take risks to find solutions to problems, and to have higher expectations from themselves in order to select and optimize the topic to the extent that satisfies both their supervisors and themselves.

Finally, four pedagogical implications are given: value English majors opinions and feelings during the topic selection and actualization process; set the academic writing course as a compulsory course for all English majors in China in order to improve students' self-efficacy in BA thesis composition; advance the time to attend academic writing courses as early as possible; and set the class period on the session of topic selection and actualization at two to four periods.

5.2 Limitations of the Present Study

The present study has the following limitations:

Firstly, the number of participants in the questionnaire is relatively small. Despite of the fact that the research is not limited to English majors at only one universities, the present study only involves 189 individuals. Larger size of samples can yield more convincing results.

Secondly, the study only investigates influences of the timing factor of the academic writing courses on English majors' self-efficacy in BA thesis composition and effects of time length factor of teachers' explanation on topic selection and actualization on English majors' self-efficacy in BA thesis composition. Other factors such as previous writing experiences or teacher's feedback are not examined. Therefore, there is much room for improvement in future studies in terms of data analysis and discussions

Thirdly, it should be noted that the findings in the study are solely based on the data gathered through questionnaire. Therefore, the results concerning the real picture of Chinese English majors' writing self-efficacy would be more convincing and comprehensive if combined with other methods such as interviews and experiments.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

Despite of several limitations in the present study, the authors hope that this study can inspire other researchers so as to make further improvement for future research. Suggestions for future research are summarized as follows:

First, efforts should be made to investigate a more general situation of English majors' writing self-efficacy in BA thesis composition through collecting larger samples.

Second, this study mainly focuses on topic selection and actualization. Future research can be conducted on other parts of BA thesis such as literature review by applying self-efficacy theories and examines how self-efficacy affects them.

Third, more data collection methods, such as experiments are advisable to be employed to make the results and arguments more convincing and more comprehensive.

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