Introducing Data-Driven Learning into Chinese Higher Education EAP Writing Instructional Settings

Authors : Jingwen Ou

Abstract : Writing for academic purposes in a second or foreign language is one of the most important and the most demanding skills to be mastered by non-native speakers. Traditionally, the EAP writing instruction at the tertiary level encompasses the teaching of academic genre knowledge, more specifically, the disciplinary writing conventions, the rhetorical functions, and specific linguistic features. However, one of the main sources of challenges in English academic writing for L2 students at the tertiary level can still be found in proficiency in academic discourse, especially vocabulary, academic register, and organization. Data-Driven Learning (DDL) is defined as "a pedagogical approach featuring direct learner engagement with corpus data". In the past two decades, the rising popularity of the application of the data-driven learning (DDL) approach in the field of EAP writing teaching has been noticed. Such a combination has not only transformed traditional pedagogy aided by published DDL guidebooks in classroom use but also triggered global research on corpus use in EAP classrooms. This study endeavors to delineate a systematic review of research in the intersection of DDL and EAP writing instruction by conducting a systematic literature review on both indirect and direct DDL practice in EAP writing instructional settings in China. Furthermore, the review provides a synthesis of significant discoveries emanating from prior research investigations concerning Chinese university students' perception of Data-Driven Learning (DDL) and the subsequent impact on their academic writing performance following corpus-based training. Research papers were selected from Scopus-indexed journals and core journals from two main Chinese academic databases (CNKI and Wanfang) published in both English and Chinese over the last ten years based on keyword searches. Results indicated an insufficiency of empirical DDL research despite a noticeable upward trend in corpus research on discourse analysis and indirect corpus applications for material design by language teachers. Research on the direct use of corpora and corpus tools in DDL, particularly in combination with genre-based EAP teaching, remains a relatively small fraction of the whole body of research in Chinese higher education settings. Such scarcity is highly related to the prevailing absence of systematic training in English academic writing registers within most Chinese universities' EAP syllabi due to the Chinese English Medium Instruction policy, where only English major students are mandated to submit English dissertations. Findings also revealed that Chinese learners still held mixed attitudes towards corpus tools influenced by learner differences, limited access to language corpora, and insufficient pre-training on corpus theoretical concepts, despite their improvements in final academic writing performance.

Keywords : corpus linguistics, data-driven learning, EAP, tertiary education in China
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