

IT'S MORE THAN JUST A LANGUAGE ISSUE

PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTIONS FOR COGNITIVE SHIFTS & BETTER WRITING QUALITY AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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BACKGROUND

Much research presumes universality of Western norms,¹ however differences in countries' education epistemologies can mean international students struggling with core academic concepts such as the literature review² particularly when undervalued as "book reports," a consequence of translanguaging.³

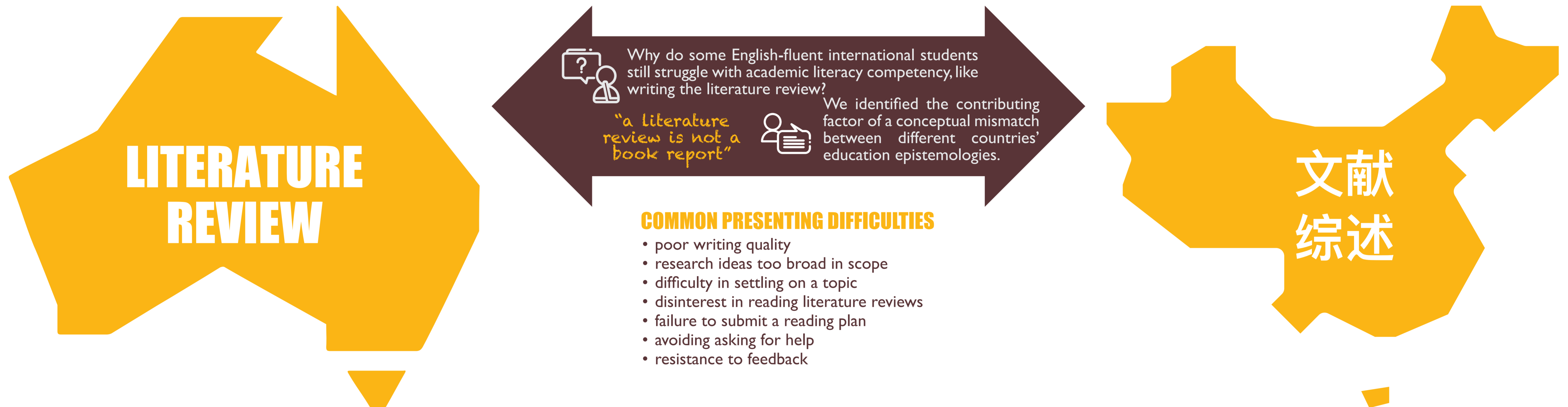
There is no uniform translation of "literature review" listed in major English-Chinese dictionaries, such as those published by Oxford or Cambridge University presses.⁴ Commonly used translations, 文献综述 and 研究综述, are not equivalent to the concept as understood in Australian universities.

This retrospective case study research⁵ stems from the authors' experiences teaching a guided-reading subject, with analytic generalisations⁶ made after a reconstruction of the timeline and events. The production of analysable data for this research was via recollection by the authors as well as through analysis of written artefacts.

THE CASE

One semester we had a Chinese-background international student (X), who presented an ambitious research idea more appropriate for multi-year research, well beyond a literature review. X appeared very resistant to the idea of restricting themselves to what they saw as a "book report" 读后感. How did we understand and address the problem?

After the supervisor identified a possible underlying conceptual mismatch, a meeting was organised with X to explain the role and value of the literature review. After a "lightbulb moment" leading to conceptual change, X was successfully guided through the steps needed to research, write, and submit the review.



LITERATURE REVIEW

文献综述



Why do some English-fluent international students still struggle with academic literacy competency, like writing the literature review?

"a literature review is not a book report"



We identified the contributing factor of a conceptual mismatch between different countries' education epistemologies.

COMMON PRESENTING DIFFICULTIES

- poor writing quality
- research ideas too broad in scope
- difficulty in settling on a topic
- disinterest in reading literature reviews
- failure to submit a reading plan
- avoiding asking for help
- resistance to feedback

INTERVENTIONS

- Explain the nature of a literature review; referrals to academic skills experts as needed
- Use and explain correct technical vocabulary
- Have students deconstruct and analyse literature review examples
- Break tasks into manageable components; watch for further signs of mismatch with "error detection and correction"
- Have students keep reflective journals on working process for metacognition

SUCCESS INDICATORS

- Improved quality of writing
- Willingness to consider literature review publication process
- New focus with appropriate scope
- Meeting draft deadlines
- Attendance at meetings

Be aware of a possible lag between interventions and evidence of cognitive shift



DIAGNOSIS

- Consider possible cultural variations in educational epistemologies
- Spend time diagnosing and analysing how best to approach the problem.
- Ask: what signals are there the student is on the 'wrong' side of the gap in knowledge?
- Craft a student-centred response with appropriate interventions



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