

High School English Application Writing based on Thematic Meaning Inquiry

Xi Chen

School of Foreign Language, China West Normal University, Nanchong 637000, China

Abstract

Writing, as an essential output skill, plays an important role in the process of learning English and is a reflection of the learner's ability to use the language in an integrated way. However, the current situation in today's English classrooms is that learners' writing skills are relatively weak compared to their reading and listening skills, and writing has become a weakness in their English learning. Therefore, this study explores the current situation and problems of writing applied essays from a macro perspective, using input-output theory and constructivist theory as guidance, and closely linking reading and writing teaching under the guidance of thematic meaning. The contextualization integrates reading and writing in many ways. "The reading for writing" teaching mode builds a bridge between reading and writing, based on in-depth reading in a thematic sense, which improves learners' reading level and broadens their knowledge, improves learners' reading skills and broadens their knowledge, enhances learners' language skills through writing in thematic contexts, internalizes the learning of the theme, enables learners to learn to transfer and innovate, and strengthens language output.

Keywords

Thematic Meaning; Reading for Writing; High School English; Application Writing.

1. Introduction

This sub-section elaborates on the main contents of the GHS English Curriculum Standard (2017 edition) regarding the integration of thematic contexts, input and output skills, and summarizes the current situation of teaching English application writing in senior high schools. It starts from the requirements of the GHS English Curriculum Standard and the direction of teaching English application writing in senior high schools.

The English Curriculum Standards for General High Schools (2017 Edition) (Ministry of Education, 2018) lists thematic context as one of the six elements of English curriculum content, and as the first element. The Curriculum Standards also state that themes provide a thematic scope or thematic context for language learning. Students' inquiry into the meaning of a theme should be the most important element of their language learning, directly affecting the extent to which they understand the discourse, the level of their thinking development and the effectiveness of their language learning. With the promulgation of the Curriculum, English classroom teaching based on thematic meaning inquiry has attracted widespread attention from frontline English teachers.

In senior high school, the English classroom should strive to create a language environment that is closely related to the meaning of the topic, establish links between thematic content and productive life, and improve students' ability to solve practical problems. At the same time, they should deepen students' understanding of the topic by exploring its meaning, pushing them to dig deeper into the content of the topic and encouraging them to use the language in an integrated way. English teachers are expected to set up curriculum activities that combine relevant and practical features to enable learners to use the language with ease, thus enhancing

their ability to learn and use English. The GCSE English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition Revised 2020) also emphasize the importance of thematic contexts and the need for vocabulary, grammar, etc. to be taught in specific contexts to facilitate students' acquisition and learning of the language.

English writing is an essential learning skill that contemporary learners must focus on and be able to use with ease, and is also an important means of international communication. Among the questions in the writing genre of the GCE, application essay writing accounts for a large proportion, and this type of English application essay, which is called "taken from life and used in practice", is practical and standardized (Wang Huiming, 2016). I have summarized the topics of English application essay writing in recent years, and classified them into the following categories: letters, letters of search, invitations and so on. The above topics reflect the flexibility of English application essay writing. At this stage of teaching, the emphasis is on improving students' practical skills in English, and the importance of application essay writing is becoming increasingly apparent as it meets this requirement.

Therefore, following the writing objectives of the Curriculum and the orientation of students' test-taking and the long-term requirement of English, it is urgent to improve writing ability. It is urgent to change the current state of writing, pay attention to the combination of reading and writing, establish the concept of reading and writing linked bodies, pay attention to the penetration of writing strategies, grasp the process of writing, and guide students towards the road of efficient writing. Therefore, it is imperative to study the development path and innovative mode of teaching high school English application writing from the perspective of core literacy in English. As we all know, reading and writing are inseparable. It is a good idea to use reading to guide students to grasp the overall structure of a discourse, to grasp the big picture, to clarify their thinking, and to use logical and coherent articulation words to lay the foundation for writing. Based on the current needs of English writing teaching in senior high schools, this study intends to adopt a reading for writing model based on thematic contexts, integrating reading and writing in depth, emphasizing the process and using reading to express and promote writing communication in thematic contexts. In English reading teaching, the focus is on students' needs and development, developing English writing thinking, creating a more authentic context, guiding students to explore the meaning of the theme, consciously strengthening instruction in the structure of the discourse, content points, language expression, logical thinking and external writing, migrating and applying them to writing, cultivating students' core literacy in the English subject, stimulating their interest and motivation in writing, and improving their writing skills.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theme Meaning

Themes refer to topic categories and content areas, and consist of thematic contexts, linguistic knowledge, cultural knowledge and value orientations. Generally, it refers to the central idea of spoken and written expressions (e.g., conversations and texts, etc., collectively referred to as discourse) (Mei, Deming, and Wang, Qiang, 2018). Theme is the core topic of a discourse. According to the famous educationalist Dewey, the actual situation is the beginning of stimulating students' thinking. The use of language takes place in a certain social context, and it cannot be separated from the context. Wang Chuming (2017) distills and determines that the importance of context cannot be ignored. Context determines the accuracy and appropriateness of language use. In other words, in authentic contexts, learners can easily understand, use, create and produce. According to Wang (2018), while focusing on developing students' language skills, the construction of context is crucial. The creation of context is very important in English language teaching. Wang Qiang (2016) concludes that language learning is as much

about learning vocabulary and grammar as it is about engaging in problem-solving activities in real-life contexts. Authentic contexts are what he emphasizes. According to Wang (2018), linguistic communication is an interaction of minds in the context of meaning, and the prerequisite for language value to be effectively realized is authentic context. It is clear that context is so important in language learning, and that creating a context around a topic is even more important for language learning. Thematic contexts provide the range of topics and the context of meaning, i.e. the range of topics and the meaning of topics (Mei Deming and Wang Qiang, 2018). The GCSE English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition) clearly states that thematic contexts provide a thematic scope for language learning or a springboard for meaningful contexts.

2.2. The Relationship between Reading and Writing

The relationship between reading and writing is very close. Reading is an important means of language input and writing is an effective means of language output. Adequate and effective language input is the basis for high quality language output. It is clear that reading and writing are inseparable from each other, as language input is a sufficient and necessary condition for language output. In addition, reading and writing have strong commonalities in terms of language use and discourse characteristics, as they are both active, interactive, two-way communication processes. The interaction between reading and writing contributes to the development of thinking and the enhancement of writing skills. Reading is the starting point for writing, and writing helps to move reading forward. The quality of writing and the level of writing reflect the effectiveness of students' reading learning. By reading without writing, the relevant knowledge and skills are not reinforced and learners forget. When writing is not read, the quality and effectiveness of writing is not maintained. Wang Chuming (2011) condensed that the effectiveness of foreign language learning depends on how closely language comprehension and output are integrated. Accordingly, reading and writing are mutually reinforcing. A good writer must be a good reader, and a good reader makes a good writer. Reading a lot to improve your writing is a practical way of doing this. Reading promotes writing and the integration of reading and writing, so that language learning and language use are interrelated and content reconstruction and language reproduction are closely linked. In English language teaching, reading and writing are similar in context, and they are integrated to focus on the elements of writing in reading and to imitate the use of language in writing.

2.3. Reading for Writing Mode

The reading for writing model is a reading-text-based approach to teaching and learning that goes beyond the text and is a mental process of imitation and re-creation. It requires students to read to write and to write to enhance reading, to create thematic contexts, to convey linguistic meaning and to provide feedback on the writing process. The Reading for Writing teaching model relies on texts of different genres in the same thematic context, guiding students to experience reading and explore the meaning of the theme, focusing on specific aspects such as the structure of the text, its content, language expression and logical thinking, allowing them to imitate and reconstruct the text, and to learn to transfer the knowledge acquired in reading about the language, content and structure of the text to their own creative work. In short, in reading for writing based on thematic contexts, reading is about writing, reading is a prerequisite for writing and writing is the ultimate goal of reading. It is important to match the two, so that students can learn to use language to express the meaning of the topic and figure out how to transfer the knowledge, skills and strategies acquired from reading to writing in an appropriate and positive way, so that they can do things in English.

3. Design of Study

3.1. Research Questions

In this study, based on the three major theories and the results of previous studies, we apply the reading for writing model based on thematic contexts to the teaching practice of English application writing in senior high school, and explore the feasibility of this model, i.e. the teaching of reading and writing in thematic contexts, in the teaching of English application writing in senior high school, and provide guiding suggestions for the teaching of English application writing in senior high school.

The study aims to explore the following issues:

- (1) How the reading for writing model based on "thematic contexts" improve senior high school students' writing skills in English?
- (2) What are the attitudes of senior high school students towards the reading-for-writing model based on "thematic contexts"?
- (3) What influence does this model have on the writing motivation of senior high school students?

3.2. Participants

In this study, 105 students from two parallel classes, Class 2, Grade 1 and Class 4, Grade 1 in a middle school in Luzhou City, Sichuan Province were selected as the research objects. There were 55 students in Class 1, including 30 boys and 25 girls. There are 50 students in Class 4, including 26 boys and 24 girls. The English foundation of the two classes is similar, and the average score difference in the entrance English test is very small. Before the experiment, through the practical writing test, the results show that there is little difference between the two classes. Before the experiment, through questionnaire survey, interview and classroom observation, the results show that there is no significant difference in the interest and motivation of students in English practical writing between the two classes. Therefore, I randomly set two classes as experimental class and control class respectively. Therefore, Class 1 is experimental class, and the teaching mode of "reading promotes writing" is adopted in the thematic context. Class 4 is control class, which adopts the traditional teaching mode of reading and writing separation. Data were observed and collected during an 8-week teaching experiment.

3.3. Process of Study

The study was divided into three phases: the pre-experimental, middle and post-experimental phases. The experimental class used a reading for writing model based on thematic contexts, while the control class used the traditional separate reading and writing model. To ensure the validity of the experiment and to reduce differences, both classes were taught by the same teacher.

The operation process of the separate teaching model for reading and writing in the control class is as follows.

In the first step, students learn new words, solve vocabulary puzzles and overcome vocabulary hurdles by using independent learning and group help to achieve the aim of being able to read, spell, write and translate.

In the second step, the grammar translation method is used in reading. The teacher lets students read independently, translate sentences, grasp the general idea, identify language points and long and difficult sentences, solve problems together with teachers and students, and consolidate the language points by letting students make sentences, and finally complete the exercises after reading.

In the third step, the results-based teaching method is used in writing. Based on their usual examination experience and self-teaching experience, teachers assign writing tasks to students and ask them to write independently after class and submit them in a uniform manner. The teacher then briefly marks and comments on the students' compositions, and focuses on testing the correct application of grammar.

The process of implementing a reading for writing model based on thematic contexts in the experimental classes is as follows.

(Reading Instruction) Pre-writing, Context-based Reading Instruction Before reading, students select clearly structured reading materials based on the writing task. During the reading, students are guided to use a variety of reading strategies to explore the meaning of the topic, study the structure, refine the content, perceive the language and analyze the thinking in order to lay the foundations for writing. In addition to the texts in the textbook, students are provided with 1-2 extended reading materials with multiple texts on the same theme according to their cognitive development level and characteristics, and are trained to use the strategies before reading. This will increase the frequency of recurrence of information on thematic content, linguistic expressions and structural schemata, and build effective scaffolding templates for subsequent independent writing, automated language application practice and transfer of innovation, so that students' language output is more successful and of higher quality.

(Writing instruction) After reading, process-based writing instruction bases on thematic contexts.

The first step is to provide guidance on the use of writing. Focus on the topic, create a real context and guide the use of the language. Students transfer the structures and paradigms, writing skills and techniques, classical syntax and diction acquired from the reading to the correct linguistic form and meaning, as well as to a beautiful writing style, based on a clear understanding of the task and purpose of writing. In the process of creating writing, the Mind map is used to construct an outline around the structure of the text, its content, language and logical connections, and to structure the writing from the reader's point of view and position, within the context of the topic.

The second step is post-writing evaluation and feedback. After completing the writing, students read back the original text and compare it with the original text, focusing on the core elements of writing, such as the structure of the text, text content, grammatical correctness, syntactic variety, lexical excellence, articulation and aesthetics, and revise themselves. This is followed by a live feedback session among peers, which is both an interactive session and an opportunity for self-learning and improvement. Through the revision of others' compositions, we find out the bright spots in others' creations and are able to apply them again to our own creations, so that we can live and apply what we have learned. As for the shortcomings, try to avoid them again in your writing. This process of student-student dialogue will help students to understand again in depth the various key factors in their writing, and will be highly effective in improving their English writing skills. On this basis, the best work is presented and the teacher conducts another teacher-student dialogue on the students' creative work. After revising and critiquing, the work is refined and re-read and re-written in order to harmonies the external and internal beauty of the writing.

4. Findings and Discussion

This study uses a variety of research methods and is guided by previous research and theoretical foundations to test multiple perspectives and finally answer the three research questions posed in this research design and conclude that the reading for writing model based on thematic contexts can improve the writing level and motivation of high school students in English application essays and that students have positive attitudes towards this model. Based

on this study, the author has gained many research insights on the teaching of writing applied essays in senior high schools and will elaborate on them.

4.1. Findings of the Study

The reading-for-writing model based on thematic contexts can improve high school students' English application writing, especially in terms of writing format, discourse structure, vocabulary use, sentence structure and writing content.

Firstly, the data on the writing performance of the experimental and control classes before the experiment showed that there was little difference in the writing levels of the two classes. After the experiment, the students in the experimental class improved their writing performance, while the students in the control class did not show any significant improvement in their writing performance. Therefore, the reading for writing model based on thematic contexts can improve the writing level of high school students' English application essays. Secondly, the interviews with the students in the experimental and control classes before and after the experiment also showed that this model had a positive effect on the students' writing skills in English. Finally, I further analyzed the data of the students in the experimental and control classes in the sub-categories of writing format, discourse structure, vocabulary use, sentence structure and writing content. After the experiment, students in the experimental class improved their performance in these five areas, which further indicates that the reading for writing model based on thematic contexts is effective in improving high school students' writing skills, especially in the five areas of format, discourse structure, vocabulary use, sentence structure and writing content.

Secondly, students were positive about the thematic context-based reading for writing model, which could improve students' motivation to write English application essays. Firstly, before the experiment, there was no significant difference between the two classes in terms of students' preferences, perceptions and writing habits. After the experiment, there were significant differences between the two classes in terms of students' preferences, perceptions and habits of writing application essays. Secondly, before the experiment, interviews with students in the experimental and control classes showed that students in both classes had low attitudes and low interest in application essay writing. After the experiment, another interview with students from both classes revealed that students in the experimental class had significantly improved their attitudes towards application writing and expressed positive attitudes towards the reading for writing model based on thematic contexts. Finally, before the experiment, through classroom observations of students in both classes, it could be found that students in both classes had low attitudes towards the application writing class and did not have much interest in it. Later in the experiment, through observations of students in the experimental class, it could be seen that students in the experimental class had greatly increased their enthusiasm and interest in the class and the classroom atmosphere was good. In summary, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods revealed that students had a favorable attitude towards the model and that the model was able to increase students' motivation to write to a certain extent.

4.2. Implications of Teaching

Based on the findings of this study and the experiences and insights gained in the process of specific teaching practices, this subsection sets out the implications of this study for teaching and learning, with a view to providing practical suggestions for the application of the reading-for-writing model based on thematic contexts to the teaching of English application writing.

Firstly, it is important to structure thematic knowledge, to rely on themes, to emphasize the role of thematic contexts, and to avoid fragmentation of learning knowledge. Teachers need to

understand their students' current level of knowledge, select appropriate texts based on their existing knowledge base, and dig deeper into the meaning of the themes behind the texts.

Secondly, reading and writing are effectively integrated to avoid training in isolation and to implement core English language skills. In writing lessons, teachers should pay attention to the close connection between reading and writing and avoid training in a single skill, as reading, as a means of language input, can provide a foundation for writing. Teachers must therefore choose materials for reading tasks according to the theme of the writing task, so that they are trained in a unified thematic context and have a certain degree of relevance.

Thirdly, teachers must be well-prepared and thorough, and be able to anticipate the problems that may arise in the classroom. Firstly, each student is different and teachers need to provide targeted guidance, which requires teachers to spend time to get to know basic information about their students. In addition, when designing teaching activities, teachers should always bear in mind that the students are the main focus and the teacher is a support person, so the design of teaching activities should reflect the interaction between teachers and students. In addition, teachers should always bear in mind that the students are the main focus of the teaching activities and that the teacher is the support person, so the design of the teaching activities should reflect the interaction between the teacher and students and the students. The whole teaching activity should take place in an authentic context, and once the teaching objectives and tasks are clear, teachers should actively use a variety of resources to create the conditions and atmosphere for students to learn.

References

- [1] Atac, B. A. (2015). From Descriptive to Critical Writing : A Study on the Effectiveness of Advanced Reading and Writing Instruction . *Procedia-social and Behavioral Sciences*,199,620-626.
- [2] Alqouran A A&Smadi O M. (2016). The effect of reading-writing integration on Jordanian undergraduate students' writing performance [J] . *Arab World English Journal*,7 (2) .
- [3] Bracewell, R. Frederisken. & Frederisken. (1982) . *Cognitive Processing and Comprehending Discourse*[M]. Cambridge :Cambridge University Press.
- [4] Beck T. (1986). Two activities that encourage real revision[A]. In *Practical Ideas for Teaching Writing as a Process* [C]. Sacramento : California State Department of Education.
- [5] Carson,J.G.(1993). Reading for writing:Cognitive perspective[A]. In Carson, J. & Leki. I. (Eds.) , *Reading in the Composition Classroom: Second Language Perspectives*[C].Boston:Heinle & Heinle, 85-104.
- [6] Dyson,Anne H&Sarah W.Freeman.(1990).On Teaching Writing: A Review of the Literature [M]. Berkeley:University of California.
- [7] Doubet. (2018). Integrating Reading and Writing Instruction in Middle and High School; The Role of Professional Development in Shaping Teacher Perceptions and Practices.[J].*Literacy Research and Instruction*. 8. Emig, J. & King, B. (1979). Emig-King Attitude Scale for Students. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No.ED,236,630.
- [8] Esky, D.(1993). Reading and Writing as Both Cognitive Process and Social Behavior [M].Boston: Heinie & Heilne.
- [9] Esmaeili,H.(2002). Integrated Reading and Writing Tasks and ESL Students' Reading and Writing Performance[J].*Canadian Modern Language Review*.