

A Comparative Study of Length Approach and Traditional Writing Methods

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Abstract

In order to improve second language learners' English level, especially their writing level, many effective methods have been put forward in the field of foreign language teaching. The Length Approach is considered as an English writing method proposed by Professor Wang Chuming in China. Combined with the characteristics of Chinese foreign language teaching environment, this paper aims to improve learners' writing level. So far, more and more scholars have begun to pay attention to this teaching method and achieved remarkable teaching results. The focus of this study is to explore the essence of the Length Approach and the differences between traditional writing methods.

Keywords

The Length Approach; The Differences; Traditional Writing Method.

1. Introduction

The English level of most second language learners is still very low, especially in writing. This section will introduce the Length Approach, including its definition, implementation procedures, differences.

2. The Definitions of Length Approach

Based on the above situation, Professor Wang Chuming proposed the Length Approach in 2000, which is a task-based method derived from Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Swain's Output Hypothesis. In his research, 201 English majors were chosen as the research participants and the teaching experiment lasted for one term. The results reveal that the Length Approach contribute significantly to boost learners' writing proficiency and English ability. Additionally, concerning the questionnaire, the students generally accepted this new writing approach, and they were more competent in the process of writing.

The Length Approach insists on writing long compositions could enhance SLL's writing proficiency and language ability. The keyword "length" fluctuates, depending on the learner's current language ability. It means learners should use more words and appropriate expressions to write compositions as best they can. As we all know, the process of second language learning is complex and affected by many factors. However, we can gradually adjust the "length" according to the learners' language ability. In other words, a long composition does not mean a high-quality article. This is only a way to write long compositions, not the ultimate goal of language learning. SLL are supposed to exceed the minimum length without upper limit. What's more, learners are inspired to write more and finally enhance their writing proficiency. Based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Swain's Output Hypothesis, the Length Approach transforms the role of teachers from marking to design tasks. In the Length Approach, by accepting understandable input, learners can effectively internalize their knowledge and complete the writing task in a productive way. In the process of writing, learners should extract relevant vocabulary and expressions, and consider grammatical rules and syntax at the same

time. Additionally, the Length Approach can reduce learners' emotional filtering and stimulate learning motivation.

3. Implementation Steps of Length Approach

According to the above definitions, we can conclude that it is different from the traditional writing methods. Its procedures are important to both learners and teachers.

First, design appropriate writing assignments. The success of the Length Approach depends on writing tasks. Teachers should consider learners' language ability, the difficulty of composition, the expression of theme, etc. The difficulty of the writing task are supposed to be appropriate and correspond with learners' language competence. Wang Chuming (2005) believes that writing tasks should meet four standards. First, there is something to write. This means that learners should not only write or output, but accept enough understandable input. While designing tasks, appropriate topics and rich reading materials should be selected by the teachers. Second, be able to write. This shows that teachers should consider learners' language ability, whether they have relevant writing knowledge or not. Third, willing to write. In other words, these topics can stimulate learners' interest and facilitate expression. Fourth, write longer. The teacher stipulated the minimum number of words, but there was no upper limit.

Second, schedule writing time and create a positive writing atmosphere. Generally speaking, students are asked to write an article once a week. In my opinion, the writing time can be adjusted corresponding with the teaching plan, but not more than once a week. Because too much homework will stimulate learners' emotional filtering. The composition should be finished after class. In addition, there are many materials for reference, such as the internet and dictionaries. The role of teachers is to present ample language materials and understandable input, and then encourage learners to express their ideas freely and creatively. With adequate preparation, students will feel relaxed and write high-quality compositions.

Third, the evaluation system and feedback. According to the traditional writing method, teachers focus on grammatical errors, which is more time-consuming. This not only causes students' anxiety, but also increases the burden on teachers. However, the length method adopts the hundred mark evaluation system, which includes four parts: length, content, organization and language. "Length" accounts for the largest proportion, 40% and 20% respectively. According to the evaluation system, learners can get sufficient feedback and make sense of what needs to be improved. Although grammatical errors are inevitable in the process of writing, numerous output can conquer these errors. The evaluation method is divided into three aspects: self-evaluation, peer evaluation and teacher evaluation. The first step is self-assessment, which can show students what they need to improve. Concerning the second step, the compositions can be shared between classmates so as to find out the advantages and disadvantages. The last one is the teacher's comment. In addition, teachers had better use some concise and insightful comments and mark out beautiful sentences and expressions. These positive feedback can meet learners' emotional needs and reduce emotional filtering. At the same time, teachers should choose some good compositions for learners' reference in order to learn from each other as well as improving learners' sense of achievement.

4. The Difference between Length Approach and Traditional Writing Method

As a new writing approach, Length Approach is different from traditional writing method in terms of length, writing time and evaluation. The differences between the two methods are shown in Table 1. Based on Swain's Output Hypothesis, the Length Approach attach more importance to learners' emotional needs and inspires them to write freely. In traditional

writing method, the evaluation system uses total scores. However, the Length Approach, it is a hundred-mark system which concerns length, content, language and organization.

Table 1. The differences between the two methods

The traditional writing methods(learning to write)	The Length Approach(writing to learn)
(1) Teaching emphasis: correction.	(1) Teaching emphasis: designing titles
(2) English writing is regarded as a tool for language practice, with little attention paid to thinking and creativity.	(2) The writing task should conform to the learner's characteristics. The topic should meet four criteria: there is something to write about, willing to write about, able to write about and long enough to write about.
(3) The task should be done in class. There is an upper limit on the length for teachers to correct. It does not value the emotional needs of learners.	(3) The task is assigned in class and students are required to write freely after class, with no upper limit on length. The longer the better. Thus release the potential of learners, gain a sense of achievement, enhance learning confidence.
(4) It highlight error correction and tries to improve learners' language ability through error correction.	(4) It pays little attention to the grading and appreciation of compositions. Good articles are selected for learners' reference.
(5) It emphasizes the teaching of writing methods, genre research and systematic learning.	(5) The emphasis on writing methods and genre research is low. At the same time, it aims to write more and use more.
(6) The correction is time-consuming.	(6) The correction takes less time.

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