

Theoretical Approaches and Teaching Suggestions for High School English Writing

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Abstract

Writing is an important skill in the process of learning English. It reflects students' comprehensive ability in English. However, writing has always been a difficult problem for students and teachers in high school English teaching. This paper focuses on combining the current mainstream writing teaching methods, aiming at the problems existing in the current writing teaching methods and proposing effective measures to improve the level of high school English writing teaching.

Keywords

English Writing Teaching; High School English; Teaching Methods; Suggestions.

1. Introduction

In the process of English language learning, the cultivation of English language skills usually consists of five aspects, which are listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing. Among them, listening and reading are receptive skills, in which language learners need to perceive a large amount of real language materials, contents and information, so as to internalize them into their own language knowledge. Speaking and writing are productive skills, in which language learners have already possessed the corresponding basic language skills through the input of language knowledge in the early stage, and then they need to produce the existing knowledge in a logical way. The 2017 Edition (Revised in 2020) of the English Curriculum Standards for Regular High School clearly states that listening, reading and viewing as comprehension skills and reading and writing as expressive skills are complementary to each other, and that the various skills should be viewed as a whole and utilized organically.

Writing is considered as one of the essential skills that high school English students need to learn. However, teachers often face difficulties in teaching English writing to students. This paper aims to sort out the relevant theories and methods of English writing teaching, analyze the current situation of high school English writing classrooms, and explore relevant countermeasures to improve high school English writing teaching.

2. Theoretical Approaches to Teaching English Writing

There are various existing English writing teaching methods, and with the continuous advancement of English teaching reform at home and abroad, several common teaching methods are output-oriented method, process-oriented method, topic-oriented method, and process-oriented method. Domestically, Wen Qiufang proposed a writing teaching method that meets Chinese characteristics, which is production-oriented method in 2014. Various writing teaching methods have their own conditions of use, and teachers need to choose flexibly according to the specific teaching situation.

2.1. The Product Approach

In the process of teaching English writing in China, the product approach is mainly used in teaching writing before the 1970s. Pincas (1982) believes that writing is related to linguistic

knowledge and focuses on the correct use of vocabulary, syntax and articulation devices. The method consists of four basic steps; the first step is to familiarize oneself with model texts. Teachers need to provide students with model texts for their articles and lead them to analyze the rhetorical devices, discourse features, and text structures in the articles. The second step is to conduct controlled training. Students need to imitate the model text provided by the teacher and practice writing according to the corresponding sentence structures and paragraphs. The third step is guided writing. Students need to write according to a specific essay topic, mobilize their previous knowledge to imitate the writing, and then need to be revised by the teacher. The fourth step is free writing. After completing the previous writing exercises, students can complete the writing task independently.

The product approach emphasizes linguistic accuracy in the writing process and the structure and quality of the essay, and is an optional way for students to engage in imitative writing. To a certain extent, it can improve students' test-taking skills. (Chen Chunmei, 2012) suggests that the teaching process of the product approach is a process in which the teacher provides a "stimulus" and the students make a "response", and by transferring the corresponding writing knowledge to the students, the students can complete the writing task naturally. The teaching method emphasizes students' writing outcomes rather than the writing process, so students' writing activities are under the teacher's control.

2.2. The Process Approach

The process approach was born in the 1970s and has since been gradually utilized in the English classroom.

For the basic principle of process pedagogy, its focus is on the different stages of writing activities, from conceptualization, data collection, writing, and revising to finalizing (Tribble, 1996). Unlike the outcome approach, the process approach focuses on the whole process of students' writing rather than on language knowledge such as grammar and chapter structure in writing (Han Jinlong, 2001).

Tribble(1996) divides the process approach into four phases, they are pre-writing, writing, revising and editing. Firstly, in the pre-writing stage, students need to perform input and conceptualization activities. Reading relevant information about the topic and background knowledge, discussing the collected information and after that completing the first draft of the writing. Secondly, in the writing stage, students need to write formally based on the materials prepared in the pre-writing stage. Thirdly, in the revision stage, students need to discuss with the teacher and make appropriate changes to the first draft according to the results of the discussion. In the final editing stage, students need to read through the entire text and make appropriate additions or deletions.

The strength of the process approach is that it focuses on the communicative process of students in the writing process. Through collaborative learning, students work effectively in the four stages of writing to improve their writing skills. Teachers and students have their own roles in the process, and effective communication between teachers and students can promote students to create better writing and improve their ability to write independently. (Han Jinlong, 2001) also pointed out that in the process teaching method, the input of language knowledge of students before writing is not enough. Moreover, the same process is used for all types of texts, ignoring the differences between different types of texts.

2.3. Genre-based Teaching Approach

The genre-based teaching approach has become a more sophisticated method of teaching writing in recent years. Different scholars describe the genre approach differently. (Swales, 1990) defines genre as "a set of communicative events with a common communicative purpose". (Cope, Kalantzis, 1993) believes that the writing process consists of three stages, namely,

modeling and analyzing, co-negotiation, and co-creation. Firstly, the teacher needs to explain the genre type, chapter structure, and linguistic features of the model text with the aim of letting the students perceive its discourse features and linguistic characteristics. Secondly, the teacher and the students should discuss the genre of the essay and find ideas for writing based on the results. Finally, students are required to write independently according to the topic and create an essay containing the appropriate genre type.

This approach also emphasizes the role of model essays in the writing classroom, so that students can improve their writing ability by consciously imitating model essays. However, in the whole writing teaching process, the cultivation of students' writing skills is neglected.

2.4. Process-genre Approach

Badger & White (2000) combined the advantages of outcome teaching, process teaching and genre teaching and put forward a new teaching model, namely, process genre teaching. Badger & White (2000) believe that writing is indeed a kind of communicative activity, which serves a communicative purpose in a specific environment. Based on this, our scholar Han Jinlong (2001) put forward the basic steps of the process genre teaching method. It consists of four stages, namely, model text analysis, imitation writing, independent writing, and editorial revision.

At the stage of model text analysis, the teacher needs to choose a classic model text of a certain genre and explain to the students the linguistic knowledge, discourse knowledge and genre structure knowledge contained in it. The aim is to familiarize students with the linguistic and discourse knowledge related to the genre. In the second stage, imitative writing, students are required to apply the knowledge they have acquired in the actual writing of their essays. In the third stage, the independent writing stage, students need to mobilize relevant background knowledge for formal writing based on the essay topic, and need to complete the idea, outline writing, and the first draft of the essay. Finally, in the stage of editing and revision, students need to complete the final draft of the composition through self-revision, peer assessment, and teacher correction.

As for the underlying teaching principles of the process genre approach, Han Jinlong (2001) believes that students in the writing process can learn both language knowledge and writing skills, and that through the means of communication approach, students can get the necessary input of knowledge and skills from the process of communicating with peers and teachers. This can play the guiding role of teachers and model compositions as well as motivate students to write. Regarding the pedagogical features of the process genre method, Liu Yuan (2023) believes that this method can create a full understanding of various writing strategies, and students will revise their compositions according to the opinions from multiple sources, which will help them to understand their own writing process and improve the pleasure of writing.

2.5. Production-oriented Approach

"Production-oriented approach" is a writing teaching method in line with Chinese characteristics proposed by Chinese scholar Wen Qiufang in 2014 in response to the requirements of English language teaching reform. Wen Qiufang (2015) divided the teaching process of the output-oriented method into three stages, namely, driving, enabling, and evaluating. In the process, all three stages must be mediated by the teacher, and the mediating role of the teacher is specifically manifested in the role of guiding, designing, and scaffolding. In the driving stage, the teacher needs to present communicative scenarios to the students and the students try to complete the communicative activities, after which the teacher explains the teaching objectives and output tasks. In the facilitation stage, the teacher describes the corresponding output tasks, and the students learn selectively while the teacher guides and checks them. For the completion of the second stage, the teacher needs to complete the evaluation task with the students in the third stage of evaluation. First, the teacher and students

work together to develop evaluation criteria for learning, and second, students need to submit outputs, and then the teacher and students use the time during and after class to evaluate the students' outputs.

The production-oriented approach emphasizes the teacher's leading role in the classroom, but this does not mean that it denies the student's leading role in the learning process. It emphasizes the teacher's leading role to give full play to the teacher's professional leadership and to maximize the effectiveness of the school. It is different from the traditional teaching methods, teachers and students in the classroom role is equally important, its ultimate goal is to allow students to participate in the entire interactive process, to achieve the effect of learning to use. However, the output-oriented method started late, in the current practical teaching has not been further applied, but also need to follow up the practice of exploration.

3. The Current Situation of English Writing Teaching in High Schools

For a long time, the vast majority of the time spent on foreign language classroom teaching in China has been spent on text comprehension and acceptance skills training, and the cultivation of output skills is only a slapdash, occasional. Teachers seem to believe that as long as they read and listen in class, students should be able to speak and write. Writing as a comprehensive skill that tests students' language literacy, output and ability to apply language is difficult for both students and teachers. Various problems still exist in the process of writing teaching (Wenqiu Fang, 2017).

3.1. The Writing Method and Teaching Mode are Relatively Single

Some English teachers have long been affected by the traditional teaching to the test, in the process of teaching writing in the actual implementation of the ideology does not have a sufficient attention, and the teaching method is not rich enough, resulting in the overall atmosphere of the final classroom teaching boring, it is difficult to stimulate and enhance the students' motivation and initiative in learning and writing. In addition, teachers do not have a comprehensive and detailed knowledge of the students, in the actual teaching process lacks relevance and purpose, still take the more traditional "duck" mode of teaching, mostly just let the students repeatedly repeated practice, which will further limit and enhance the students' writing awareness and ability.

3.2. Neglecting the Learner-centredness in Writing

Most of the writing teaching classrooms are the process of teacher's explanation of writing models or examples. The knowledge of writing is mainly transmitted through the teacher, rather than allowing students to explore independently and perceive the language characteristics and structure of the essay. In the actual teaching process, the teacher mostly occupies the main position, students are often only in a passive position to accept the knowledge, it is difficult to play out the personal initiative, and over time students will lose interest in English writing, writing thinking is not effective training.

3.3. Neglected the Training of Students' Thinking in Writing

Currently, the scores of written expression in the college entrance examination are increasingly on the rise. Due to the purpose and reason of test-taking examinations, teachers and students pay more and more attention to the score of writing. The focus in writing teaching is also on the accuracy of language and the appropriateness of content, and the training of thinking in writing has been neglected to a certain extent. The English Curriculum Standard for Regular High Schools clearly puts forward the cultivation of students' thinking quality, so it is necessary to pay attention to the training of students' thinking ability in writing teaching. Especially in the

process of writing ideas, language organization and layout, it can best reflect the students' thinking in writing.

4. Improvement Countermeasures for English Writing Teaching

Aiming at the current situation of English writing teaching in high school, combined with the cultivation objectives required by the current new curriculum standard, the following teaching suggestions and measures are put forward for a series of problems existing in writing teaching.

4.1. Innovate English Writing Classroom Teaching Mode

In the high school English writing classroom teaching, teachers should focus on getting rid of the traditional writing teaching mode and shift to the flipped classroom mode. Before class, students are presented with background knowledge and learning materials related to the writing task, so that they can fully perceive the authentic language materials and understand the requirements of the writing task. For problems that cannot be understood, in-depth analysis is carried out, and the teacher provides specific explanations according to the students' problems. Through driving questions, students can be helped to think deeply and be actively involved in the writing process. On this basis, it really stimulates students' sense of problem and promotes them to identify problems in the writing process.

4.2. Focus on the Transfer and Application of Writing Knowledge

Knowledge of writing is a prerequisite for students to embark on a writing task, and teachers should supplement students' pre-writing phase with plenty of background knowledge and writing sentence patterns related to the topic. Scaffold students and guide them through each step of the writing process. Focus on transferring students' writing knowledge to writing tasks with authentic contexts. In the process of transferring and applying, pay attention to the content and form of writing activities, which need to be designed according to students' current writing level and ability. In the process of setting up the migration activities, the tasks should be set at an appropriate level of difficulty according to the students' level to meet their zone proximal development.

4.3. Improve the Evaluation Method of English Writing Teaching

In the process of classroom teaching evaluation, the teacher's correction of students' writing is a necessary part. However, in the process of implementation, we can try to change the corresponding evaluation strategy, and utilize multiple evaluation methods to evaluate students' writing. For example, after the completion of writing through the students' self-evaluation, peer evaluation, teacher evaluation, group evaluation way to analyze their own composition. It can help them analyze the strengths and weaknesses in their compositions from different perspectives, find problems and reflect on their own shortcomings. Teachers can let students know the writing standards and writing requirements through the way of multiple evaluation, and improve students' writing level through evaluation to promote learning.

5. Conclusion

English writing teaching methods include the product approach, the process approach, the genre-based teaching approach, the process genre approach, and the production-oriented approach in China. All these writing methods have their own advantages, and applicable teaching situations. In the high school English writing teaching classroom, teachers should choose appropriate teaching methods according to different teaching objectives, integrate the advantages of different teaching methods, and design different forms of writing tasks according to students' learning needs and writing levels. English writing teaching methods should be used as a compass for teachers in actual teaching, pointing out specific directions for the

implementation of writing teaching, and the theory of writing teaching needs to be constantly combined with the actual teaching situation, so as to truly promote the quality of students' thinking quality through the cultivation of students' writing skills.

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