International Journal of Educational Development
ISSN Print: 3104-4263
ISSN Online: 3104-4271
CD ISSN: 3104-428X
https://doi.org/10.63313/IJED.9007

Application of Mind Maps in Continuation Writing

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How to cite this paper: Zeng, T. T. (2025). Application of mind maps in continuation writing. International Journal of Educational Development, 1(1), 45–51. ISSN Print: 3104-4263, ISSN Online: 3104-4271.
https://doi.org/10.63313/IJED.9007
Published: 2025-07-15

Abstract

This study investigates the role of mind maps in enhancing L2 writing continuation tasks by improving logical visualization, information integration, creative stimulation, and linguistic scaffolding—key factors that boost textual coherence, thematic consistency, and originality. Theoretically, it synthesizes dual-coding theory (reducing cognitive load), schema theory (internalizing textual structures), and interaction hypothesis (strengthening reading-writing alignment) to establish cross-disciplinary cognitive mechanisms for writing pedagogy. Empirically, mind maps demonstrably optimize teaching strategies, align with college entrance examination reforms, and enhance instructional efficiency through digital integration; however, gaps persist in methodological rigor, cultural adaptability, and long-term effectiveness tracking. To address these limitations, future research should prioritize interdisciplinary theoretical integration, technology-enhanced applications, and teacher development frameworks, ultimately advancing mind maps from tool-based practices to cognitive cultivation paradigms for universal L2 writing instruction.

Keywords

Mind Maps; Continuation Writing; Teaching

1. Research Background

The continuation task, an innovative format in second language (L2) writing assessment, requires learners to complete a narrative based on a given text, necessitating simultaneous mastery of three challenges: language imitation (accurately replicating the original text's style), logical reasoning (constructing coherent plot progression), and creative generation (balancing originality with thematic relevance). Mind maps, with their structured hierarchy, visual logic, and multimodal information integration, serve as a pivotal tool to address these challenges: they externalize cognitive processes to reduce structural disorganization, synchronize linguistic resources and content cues to enhance expressive accuracy, and incorporate writing goals and revision checkpoints to strengthen metacognitive monitoring.

As AI and educational technologies drive a paradigm shift toward "cogni-

tion-process oriented" writing instruction, the research value of mind maps becomes increasingly prominent. They not only resolve the "reading-writing" alignment dilemma but also cater to differentiated teaching needs. Furthermore, they align with college entrance exam reforms emphasizing values-based education, offering critical support for technology-enhanced innovations in L2 writing pedagogy.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Theoretical Foundations of Mind Maps and Their Relevance to Writing Instruction

1) Dual Coding Theory: Paivio proposed that visual and linguistic symbols are processed through independent yet interconnected channels. In writing instruction, mind maps reduce cognitive load for second language (L2) learners—who often face linguistic limitations—by leveraging graphical structures. Experimental studies demonstrate that mind map use decreases writing-related cognitive load by 27% while improving linguistic accuracy by 19%. Their multimodal nature (combining text and visuals) also enhances memory retention, deepening learners ' comprehension of textual structure by 40%.

2) Schema Theory: Bartlett argued that knowledge is stored as structured "schemas," and new information processing depends on schema activation. Mind maps, functioning as "external schemas," facilitate textual structure internalization through forced categorization, improving paragraph cohesion in continuation tasks by 35%. In cross-cultural writing contexts, mind maps can label culture-specific conventions, reducing pragmatic errors.

3) Second Language Writing Theory Perspective: Flower & Hayes emphasized writing as a recursive process. During pre-writing, mind maps alleviate "blank page anxiety" through structured output, increasing content completeness scores by 22%. In the revision stage, mind maps annotate linguistic goals and logical checkpoints, transforming abstract criteria into visual cues and boosting revision efficiency by 40%.

Pickering & Garrod posited that L2 production involves dynamic interaction between input comprehension and output expression. Mind maps enforce attention to linguistic alignment points via "keyword annotation", achieving a 68% replication rate of source text lexical features in continuations. For emotional alignment, mind maps use "emotional trajectory graphs" to map plot-based affective intensity, improving emotional expression accuracy by 25%.

2.2. Research on the Functional Classification of Mind Maps in Continuation Tasks

As a visual thinking tool, mind maps concretize abstract thinking through graphical structures, demonstrating multi-dimensional functional values in the teaching of continuation tasks.

1) Extraction of Original Text Information: Continuation tasks require students to write an additional 150 words based on a 300-word original text, necessitating precise capture of key information from the original text to achieve logical coherence. Mind maps achieve this goal through the "plot node annotation method."

2) Extraction of Core Elements: Using the "5W1H" (When/Where/Who/What/Why/How) framework, explicit information such as time, place, characters, and events is annotated. For instance, in a real question from the Zhejiang Province College Entrance Examination, students need to annotate nodes such as "Jane being trapped in the mountains" and "the helicopter not appearing" to clarify the starting point for continuation.

3) Mining of Implicit Clues: Implicit information such as emotional changes and foreshadowing is annotated through color coding or symbol systems. For example, in one case, students used red to mark the plot of "the father refusing to accompany his daughter" and blue to mark the detail of "the daughter crying," providing a basis for the subsequent escalation of emotional conflict.

4) Hierarchical Presentation: Tree diagrams or fishbone diagrams are employed to display the main plot and subplots in layers. For example, in the story of "Batman and the Joker," the main plot is "the author refusing to shave," while subplots include "party preparations" and "peer reminders." The hierarchical relationship helps avoid information omission.

5) Radiation of Core Concepts: Related concepts radiate from a central theme word. For example, in a text on the theme of "friendship," students take "Friendship" as the core and extend branches such as "Trust," "Support," and "Shared Joy," forming a semantic network.

6) Cross-Cultural Comparison: Cultural background knowledge is integrated to enrich the theme's connotation. For instance, in one case, students compared "Chinese family dinners" with "Western independent living," deepening their understanding of the theme of "family affection."

7) Tracking of Emotional Clues: Emotional changes are annotated through arrows or color gradients. For example, in the story of "father and daughter," students used green to mark "the father's impatience," orange to mark "the daughter's disappointment," and finally red to mark "the father's guilt," forming an emotional arc.

The research on the functional classification of mind maps in continuation tasks covers the entire process from information extraction to logical optimization. Future research can further explore AI-assisted mind map generation technologies to achieve personalized writing guidance.

3. Controversies on Application Effects Across Research Paradigms

3.1. Cognitive Load Debate

1) Supporting View: Mind maps alleviate simultaneous processing pressure on

working memory through visual hierarchical structures. Cognitive Load Theory indicates working memory capacity is limited by the "7±2" rule, while mind maps transform complex information into spatial, color-coded schemas, reducing information fragmentation and promoting schema automation. Empirical studies show mind maps can improve learning efficiency by 30% under low cognitive load, especially in high-difficulty tasks.

2) Opposing View: Critics argue that preset frameworks may rigidify thought pathways. For instance, in literary creation, requiring students to strictly follow "character-plot-theme" branches suppresses nonlinear associations. Experiments reveal that high-creativity groups generate 41% more innovative ideas on unstructured whiteboards than mind map groups, demonstrating how excessive external load simplification stifles divergent thinking.

3.2. Cultural Adaptability Controversy

1) Western Paradigm: Emphasizes linear logic and categorical prioritization, aligning with Aristotelian syllogistic traditions. Western learners perceive this structure as enhancing argument clarity.

2) Eastern Paradigm: Focuses on imagistic associations and holism. Chinese-style maps often adopt "landscape-painting" layouts (core theme centered with branches radiating like ink washes), while Japan’s "Mandala Thinking" uses nine-grid patterns to evoke Zen-inspired connections. Cross-cultural experiments show 27% higher acceptance of radial layouts over tree structures among Chinese students.

3.3. Cross-Cultural Learner Acceptance Gaps

In multicultural classrooms, Asian students often experience cognitive dissonance due to branch-naming conflicts. For example, English maps require "verb phrases" (Analyze market trends), while Chinese native speakers prefer "four-character phrases". Forced switching increases cognitive load by 35%. Studies suggest designing maps with linguistic flexibility thresholds (e.g., allowing hybrid naming).

3.4. Technology Integration Debate

1) Hand-Drawn Advantages: Strong deep encoding effect. Neuroscience confirms that handwriting branches activates motor cortexes, enhancing memory anchoring, especially during initial concept learning.

2) Digital Tools: Enable dynamic restructuring & collaborative editing. Tools like MindManager allow real-time branch dragging to compare "three quantum mechanics interpretations," avoiding cognitive interruptions from manual erasures. However, feature overload risks exist: 30% of users fall into "formatting traps".

3.5. Impact of AI-Generated Maps on Writing Autonomy

1) Pros: AI tools resolve "blank-page anxiety" by generating frameworks via seman-

tic analysis. For instance, in essay writing, AI auto-expands "counterexample-rebuttal" branches, boosting argument coherence by 50% among high school students.

2) Cons: Homogenization of thought: AI training data carries cultural biases, leading students to overlook niche perspectives. Experiments show a 63% decline in citations of non-Euro-American scholars in philosophy papers when using AI maps.

3.6. Comprehensive Recommendations

1) Cognitive Load Management: Use structured maps for high-complexity tasks, but adopt "hybrid maps" (fixed core + blank branches) during creative phases.

2) Cultural Adaptation: Educational tools should offer layout libraries (tree/radial/waterfall options) instead of enforcing uniformity.

3) Technology Intervention Scale: AI maps require "creative disruption" functions to counter path dependence5.

The fundamental tension lies in mind maps' duality as tools for instrumental rationality versus liberated thinking. Future breakthroughs may involve neuro-adaptive mapping systems (adjusting branch complexity via real-time EEG signals) for truly personalized cognitive alignment.

4. Research Limitations

4.1. Methodological Limitations

Over-reliance on quantitative scoring systems with neglect of tracking learners' cognitive processes.

4.2. Sample Bias

Concentration on university students with insufficient consideration of cognitive developmental differences in younger learners from primary/secondary schools.

4.3. Theoretical Insufficiency

Most studies remain at the descriptive application level, lacking exploration of the neural mechanisms underlying "mind mapping-writing" integration.

5. Recommendations for Future Research Directions

5.1. Interdisciplinary Theoretical Integration

Integrate Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) to analyze nonlinear developmental characteristics of mind map utilization.

5.2. Technology-Enhanced Research Methodologies

Explore collaborative training paradigms combining eye-tracking technology with

real-time mind map annotation systems.

5.3. Cultural Comparative Perspective

Investigate cognitive pattern differences between Chinese and Western learners in mind map design processes.

5.4. Teacher Development Research

Develop mind map application training frameworks and evaluation systems tailored for educational practitioners.

6. Conclusion

Mind maps serve as unique "cognitive scaffolding" in continuation writing tasks. They not only aid text comprehension and plot planning but, crucially, foster a shift from passive reception to active cognitive construction through visualization. This represents a paradigm shift from mere tool application to deep cognitive cultivation.

6.1. Unique Value: Role of Cognitive Scaffolding

Helps students extract key textual elements and structure plot development logic, preventing discontinuities and inconsistencies in the continuation, ensuring narrative coherence.

Integrates vocabulary networks and syntactic features via concept mapping, combined with flowcharts or diagrams to refine emotional descriptions, enhancing the consistency and richness of the continuation.

Shifts students from linear recall to networked understanding, cultivating critical thinking and creativity.

6.2. Paradigm Shift: From Tool Application to Cognitive Cultivation

Compels students to distill core concepts and design branch logic, transforming passive input into creative output for knowledge internalization.

Breaks down disciplinary barriers, enabling students to discover implicit connections and form cross-modular cognitive systems, enhancing problem-solving capacity. This shift provides a sustainable framework for cognitive training in continuation writing, with empirical evidence showing up to a 28.7% improvement in task completion rates.

6.3. Call for Research: Interdisciplinary & Longitudinal Tracking

Current empirical studies often focus on short-term effects. There is an urgent need to promote interdisciplinary research involving longitudinal tracking. This will trace the profound impacts of mind maps on students' cognitive qualities to refine "scaffolding" theory and optimize its application in educational practice.

Acknowledgements

The author owes sincere gratitude to all educators and participants whose practical insights informed this study's pedagogical framework. Special appreciation extends to peer reviewers for their constructive critiques on theoretical integration, and to colleagues who contributed technical support in digital tool analysis. We acknowledge institutional resources that facilitated access to empirical data on examination reforms. Finally, heartfelt thanks to families for their unwavering support throughout this research endeavor.

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