

Exploration of teaching strategies for continuation writing under New College Entrance Examination

Yuquan Xiang

China West Normal University, Nanchong Sichuan, 637000, China

Email: 2585507036@qq.com

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Abstract

This paper explores teaching strategies for continuation writing in high school English under the New College Entrance Examination (NCEE) system. Based on the interactive alignment model and the production-oriented approach, strategies such as stimulating writing motivation, diversifying materials, encouraging innovative thinking, increasing contextualized English input, and implementing multi-dimensional assessment are proposed. The innovation lies in the synergistic application of these theories with teaching strategies, addressing traditional teaching challenges and enhancing students' language skills and critical thinking. The findings offer new insights and methods for high school English continuation writing instruction.

Keywords

New College Entrance Examination; Continuation Writing; Teaching Strategies; Interactive Alignment Model; Production-Oriented Approach

1. Introduction

Under the framework of the New College Entrance Examination (NCEE) system, the education in China has undergone significant transformations, particularly in the assessment of language proficiency. The NCEE has introduced innovative methods to evaluate students' comprehensive language skills, one of which is the "Continuation Writing" task. This task requires students not only to comprehend a given text but also to extend the narrative or argument in a manner that demonstrates their understanding, creativity, and linguistic competence. The introduction of this task reflects a shift in educational philosophy, emphasizing the development of critical thinking and the ability to synthesize information. It challenges traditional rote learning methods and encourages students to engage more deeply with texts, fostering a more holistic approach to language education. The continuation writing is supported by language acquisition theory, echoing the demand of foreign language exams for comprehensive language proficiency testing, and has been verified

through empirical research. It can effectively promote learning through exams and has a very positive effect on foreign language teaching, making it suitable for high stakes exams such as NCEE[1]. However, there have been some problems in the teaching of continuation writing in high school. This paper aims to explore those problems and investigate the pedagogical strategies that can effectively facilitate students' performance in the "Continuation Writing" tasks, thereby enhancing their writing and reading competence, thinking quality and learning ability within the context of the NCEE.

2. Theoretical basis for continuation writing

2.1. Interactive Alignment Model

The interactive alignment model proposed by Pickering and Garrod provides a comprehensive framework for understanding dialogue and communication processes. This model posits that interlocutors align their mental models through a process of priming at various levels of linguistic representation. This alignment occurs automatically and minimizes the need for explicit mental modeling of the other speaker's intentions

The model suggests that during dialogue, speakers and listeners continuously adjust their linguistic representations to match those of their conversational partners. This alignment facilitates smoother communication and allows for the construction of shared meaning[2]. The interactive alignment model is particularly relevant to continuation tasks, as it emphasizes the dynamic interplay between comprehension and production. By understanding how mental models are aligned during communication, educators can better design tasks that encourage students to engage deeply with texts and produce coherent continuations that reflect a deep understanding of the original content.

2.2. Production-oriented approach

Wen Qiufang's production-oriented approach (POA) offers a pedagogical framework that emphasizes the importance of output in language learning. The POA is based on the hypothesis that output-driven activities are more effective in motivating language learners and enhancing their performance

This approach consists of three main components: teaching principles, teaching hypotheses, and teacher-mediated teaching processes. The teaching principles include learning-centered, learning-using integration, and whole-person education, and the teaching hypotheses are output-driven, input-enabled, and selective learning. The teaching processes contain three phases, each mediated by the teacher: motivating, enabling, and assessing. The three principles set guidelines for the other two components; the three hypotheses serve as a theoretical basis for the teaching process; the three-phase teaching process reflects and illustrates the principles while testing the hypotheses.[3]. In the context of continuation writing, the POA encourages students

to engage in productive activities before receiving input, which helps them identify gaps in their knowledge and become more motivated to learn. By starting with output, students are prompted to notice what they lack in order to complete a task, thereby making the subsequent input more meaningful and targeted. This approach not only improves students' language proficiency but also fosters their ability to think critically and creatively when extending texts.

3. Existing problems in teaching

3.1. Lack of Motivation

Many students lack the motivation to engage in continuation writing tasks. This could be due to a variety of factors, such as not seeing the relevance of the activity to their overall language learning goals, or not being interested in the topics presented. Without a clear understanding of why they are doing a particular task, students may not be as invested in the process, leading to a lack of enthusiasm and effort. Additionally, if students do not feel confident in their writing abilities, they may be hesitant to participate in continuation writing, fearing that their work will not meet expectations or that they will be judged negatively. This lack of motivation can hinder the progress and make it difficult to achieve the ultimate goal of continuation writing.

3.2. Monotonous Materials

In current high school English reading and writing teaching, teachers often rely on limited and standardized materials, which leads to students being exposed to a narrow range of text types and topics[4]. This can lead to students becoming bored and disinterested in the task. When the same types of texts or topics are used repeatedly, students do not have the opportunity to explore different genres, styles, or themes. This lack of diversity can limit their exposure to a wide range of vocabulary, sentence structures, and ideas. As a result, students may struggle to develop their integrated skills and may not be able to express themselves effectively in different contexts. Moreover, monotonous materials may not cater to the diverse interests and preferences of students, making it difficult for them to find topics that they are genuinely interested in and motivated to write about.

3.3. Rigid Training Methods

The training methods employed in continuation writing are often rigid and do not allow for much flexibility or creativity. Students may be required to follow strict guidelines or templates, which can stifle their imagination and limit their ability to think critically and independently. This rigid approach may not encourage students to experiment with different writing techniques or to explore their own ideas and perspectives. As a result, their writing may become formulaic and lack

originality.

3.4. Insufficient Input

Stephen D. Krashen summarized that the psychological processes of language acquisition and language learning are input, filtering, absorption, organization and monitoring[5]. However, for most high school students, the heavy academic pressure means they can only receive very little English input, let alone steps such as filtering and absorption, which make it difficult for them to generate ideas and content for their writing. Most students' language input comes from textbooks or teachers' classroom language. A small number of students will actively seek language input after class, such as watching different types of movies, reading English secretaries with different themes, etc. Without exposure to a wide range of texts, genres, and topics, students may struggle to find inspiration and may not have the necessary vocabulary or language structures to express their thoughts effectively. Insufficient input can also lead to a lack of understanding of different writing styles and conventions, making it challenging for students to adapt their writing to different contexts and purposes.

3.5. Single-Sided Assessment

The evaluation of continuation writing is typically unilateral, with teachers being the sole assessors. This single-sided approach often lacks a unified set of evaluation criteria, leading to subjective and inconsistent feedback. Besides, without a clear and consistent evaluation framework, students struggle to understand what constitutes high-quality writing and how to improve their skills. This lack of standardized assessment also limits the opportunity for peer assessment or self-assessment, which could provide additional perspectives and enhance the learning process.

4. Teaching Strategies for Continuing Writing

4.1. Stimulating Writing Motivation

The Interactive Alignment Model believes that collaboration occurs both at the linguistic level (such as speech, vocabulary, syntax, etc.) and at the situational mode level. Both parties in communication coordinate their situational patterns in interaction, which leads to language level coordination and understanding of the exchanged information[6]. Therefore, the creation of scenarios is essential before writing instruction. Initially, by tethering writing assignments to scenarios that mirror real life or tap into students' individual interests, the tasks immediately become more pertinent and enticing. For instance, harnessing the appeal of sports through continuation writing tasks centered around athletic narratives not only aligns with students' passions but also primes their mental models for engagement,

as posited by the Interactive Alignment Model. This initial alignment facilitates a smoother transition into the writing process, as students are already mentally attuned to the subject matter.

Subsequently, the establishment of transparent and attainable objectives for these writing endeavors is crucial. This clarity of purpose, broken down into incremental, manageable phases, coupled with continuous feedback, serves as a motivational scaffold. It mirrors the POA's emphasis on output-driven learning, where the journey towards a tangible goal is as important as the goal itself. Each feedback-infused step acts as a milestone, allowing students to visualize their advancement and bolster their self-assurance.

Furthermore, the infusion of competitive or collaborative dynamics into the writing process can act as a significant motivational catalyst. Group-based continuation story creation or incentivized writing competitions don't just make the task more enjoyable; they also introduce an element of social interaction. Through such collaborative efforts, students not only produce but also interact, aligning their understanding and output in a shared learning environment.

In essence, by integrating these strategies that draw from both the Interactive Alignment Model and the POA, the writing process is transformed into an engaging, purposeful, and socially interactive activity. This not only stimulates motivation but also embeds the learning within a framework that promotes deeper cognitive engagement and linguistic proficiency, setting a robust foundation for effective continuation writing.

4.2. Diversifying and Enriching Materials

In order to overcome the problem of monotonous materials, teachers should strive to diversify and enrich the reading and writing materials used in continuation writing tasks. The Production-Oriented Approach underscores the significance of engaging and relevant input to catalyze output. For high school students, narrative texts that are close to daily life and have strong interest can fully stimulate their initiative and enthusiasm for continuation, which is in line with their cognitive level. Compared to narrative writing, other types of articles, including expository essays and argumentative essays, require students to have a solid foundation in English and strong analytical skills. But for the vast majority of high school students, this type of article can easily increase the difficulty of continuation writing. Besides, under the background of the new college entrance examination reform, the type of continuation writing are mostly narrative. Students can boldly imagine and actively think about them under the guidance of story clues, thus completing the continuation writing task.

Professor Wang Chuming proposed in his empirical research that teachers should guide students to choose reading materials for continuation writing task, which should be interesting and extendable. The language of the reading materials should

be controlled for difficulty, easy to imitate, not too short, and the word count should be around 1000 words[7]. Therefore, teachers should try to choose reading materials that are both interesting and extensible, as well as materials with a strong sense of life.

4.3. Encouraging Innovation and Divergent Thinking

To counteract the rigidity of traditional training methods, teachers should encourage innovation and divergent thinking in continuation writing. They should initiate the writing process by setting open-ended, real-world related prompts that require students to produce text. For example, instead of a linear continuation, posing a question like "What if the main character made a different choice at this point?" not only encourages divergent thinking but also aligns with POA's principle of "output-driven" learning, where the challenge of the task itself motivates students to seek and apply new knowledge. Additionally, teachers can organize brainstorming sessions where students share their ideas and build upon each other's suggestions. This collaborative approach not only stimulates creativity but also exposes students to a variety of perspectives. Furthermore, teachers can praise and reward innovative and unique ideas, even if they do not perfectly fit the expected outcome. By fostering an environment that values creativity and divergent thinking, students will be more likely to take risks and develop their own writing style, leading to more engaging and original continuation writing.

4.4. Increasing Contextualized English Input

To address the issue of insufficient input materials, Teachers should expand the contextualized English input by incorporating diverse reading and listening activities linked to continuation writing tasks. For instance, prior to a continuation writing task, students could engage with stories by the same author or of a similar theme, which will familiarize them with the language style and vocabulary. Some studies have shown that the higher the quality of language input, the better the language acquisition effect of students. This type of input can come from the teacher's teaching, as well as from reading and listening materials. Effective language input can provide rich context, helping students understand and master the rules and usage of language, thereby improving their language comprehension ability[8]. Additionally, using authentic materials like newspaper articles, podcasts, or movies exposes students to various accents and cultural nuances, enriching their language repertoire. This strategy follows the Interactive Alignment Model by facilitating a dynamic interaction between input and output, providing a robust foundation for continuation writing and enabling students to draw on a broader spectrum of ideas and linguistic structures. By increasing the contextualized English input, students will have a better foundation for their continuation writing and will be able to draw upon a wider range of ideas and language structures.

4.5. Implementing Multi-Dimensional Assessment

To improve the evaluation process of continuation writing, teachers should implement a multi-dimensional approach that involves not only teacher assessment but also self-assessment and peer assessment. Teacher assessment should be based on clear and specific criteria that are shared with students beforehand. Assessment should be considered from three dimensions: content expressiveness, language accuracy, and discourse fluency[9]. This ensures that students understand what is expected of them and can work towards meeting those standards. Besides, the object of evaluation should change according to teaching requirements and teaching practice. Teachers cannot and do not need to always regard the entire class as the object of analysis and research. Instead, they should combine point and surface analysis, starting point analysis, and dynamic analysis, and investigate and analyze certain special groups or cases with purpose and focus, truly improving the teaching quality of continuation writing[10]. Self-assessment allows students to reflect on their own writing and identify areas for improvement. Teachers can provide students with a checklist or rubric to guide their self-assessment process. Peer assessment, on the other hand, provides students with the opportunity to receive feedback from their classmates, which can offer a different perspective and help them see their writing from a new angle. To ensure the effectiveness of peer assessment, teachers should provide students with training on how to give constructive feedback. By incorporating these different evaluation methods and providing specific criteria, teachers can give students a more comprehensive and meaningful assessment of their continuation writing, helping them to improve their skills in a targeted and effective manner.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored teaching strategies for continuation writing under the New College Entrance Examination (NCEE) system. Based on the interactive alignment model and the production-oriented approach (POA), it identified issues such as lack of motivation, monotonous materials, rigid methods, insufficient input, and single-sided assessment. To address these, strategies like stimulating motivation, diversifying materials, encouraging innovation, increasing input, and implementing multi-dimensional assessment were proposed.

The innovation of this study lies in the synergistic application of the interactive alignment model and the production-oriented approach to the teaching strategies for continuation writing. Specifically, the strategies are designed to actively engage students through motivational techniques, diverse materials, and creative thinking, while ensuring their outputs are well-aligned with the inputs through increased contextualized English exposure. This unique blend not only addresses the challenges faced in traditional teaching but also fosters a more effective and interactive learning process, ultimately enhancing students' language skills and critical thinking

within the NCEE framework.

However, the study's limitations are significant and warrant attention. Firstly, the study's primary focus on theoretical frameworks means that while the proposed strategies are conceptually sound, their practical effectiveness in real-world classroom settings remains untested. This gap in empirical validation could limit the immediate applicability of the findings. Secondly, the lack of differentiated instruction is a notable shortcoming. Students have diverse learning styles and abilities, and a one-size-fits-all approach may not meet the needs of all learners.

Future research could explore the effectiveness of these teaching strategies in diverse educational contexts, such as different regions or schools with varying resources. Studies could investigate the impact of these strategies on students with different learning styles, abilities, and backgrounds. Longitudinal studies could assess the long-term effects of these strategies on students' language development and academic achievement. Furthermore, the role of technology in enhancing continuation writing could be explored, as digital tools and platforms offer new opportunities for interactive and collaborative learning. Finally, research could focus on developing more refined assessment tools and criteria to better evaluate the quality of continuation writing and provide more targeted feedback to students.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the teaching of continuation writing under the NCEE system. By addressing the identified challenges and implementing the suggested strategies, educators can significantly enhance students' language skills and critical thinking abilities. Future research should continue to explore and refine these strategies to ensure their effectiveness and adaptability in various educational settings.

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