

Original Paper

A Study on the Teaching Methodologies of College English

Writing

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Abstract

Through research on the compositions written by the surveyed university students from different majors in English final examination, it can be concluded that more than half of the students need to take great efforts to improve their English writing level. The problems existing in writing is closely related to the deficiency in the input of English reading. According to Krashen's "i+1" theory, university students need to greatly increase their input of English reading and it should begin with reading the materials that surpass their present level. The best way to do so is reading the great works in British and American literature.

Keywords

"i+1" theory, College English, writing, teaching

1. Introduction

English is a very important international language. As a university student, to learn English well is of great importance. English writing is an essential component of English learning. It is an important form of language output. It plays a crucial role in international communication. Yet in university students' English writing, there exist some common problems. Chinese scholars have put forth the problems existing in college English writing. Wei Yu (2009) believes that from the perspective of composition analysis, most students' compositions are at or below the medium level. Wang Hong (2016) holds that the common problems in students' writing are mainly reflected in four aspects: structure, logic, wording, and sentence pattern. Zhang Hongli (2018) argues that almost all college students know the importance of English writing, but most students write articles with empty content and poor thinking, and input deficiency is the leading cause to this problem. Lin Ruolin (2022) points out that college English writing is a major challenge in the process of learning English. In order to improve students'

English writing level and help them achieve learning goals, teachers should apply effective teaching strategies in college English writing teaching, transforming the traditional one-way teaching method with teachers as the main body into a student-centered teaching mode. Huang Xiaoling (2022) puts forth that Chinglish thinking is a challenge that current college students need to face to improve their English writing skills. Cultural differences are the root cause of different thinking styles, and cultivating and improving cross-cultural expression skills requires the speaker to achieve a rapid transformation from their native language thinking style to the target language thinking style. Li Yi (2023) assumes that as a comprehensive language thinking activity and output skill, writing is an important component of college English teaching. However, traditional writing teaching generally emphasizes language knowledge learning and neglects the cultivation of thinking ability.

Based on the above studies, through research on the English final examination test papers of the surveyed non-English major students in Foshan University in the second semester of the 2022-2023 academic year, this paper intends to explore the effective ways of improving the writing level of university students.

2. The Deficiency in the Input of English Reading and the Countermeasures

2.1 The Deficiency in the Input of English Reading

2.1.1 Analysis of the Composition Scores of the Surveyed Students

In the English final exam of Foshan University in the second semester of the 2022-2023 academic year, the maximum score for “Academic Writing” is 15 points.

According to the English final exam results of 2021 Computer Science Class 1 and Class 2, out of 77 students, 7 scored between 13.5 and 15 in academic writing, accounting for 9.1%; 31 students with scores ranging from 12 to 13, accounting for 40.3%; 24 students with scores ranging from 10.5 to 11.5, accounting for 31.2%; 12 students with scores ranging from 9 to 10, accounting for 15.6%; Three students with scores below 9, accounting for 3.9%.

According to the English final exam results of Class 1, Class 2, and Class 3 of 2021 Mechanical Design, Manufacturing, and Automation, out of 68 students, 6 of them scored between 13.5 and 15 in academic writing, accounting for 8.8%; 16 students with scores ranging from 12 to 13, accounting for 23.5%; 20 students with scores ranging from 10.5 to 11.5, accounting for 29.4%; 12 students with scores ranging from 9 to 10, accounting for 17.6%; 14 students scored below 9, accounting for 20.6%.

According to the English final exam results of 2021 Pharmacy Class 1 and Class 2, out of 57 students, one student scored between 13.5 and 15 in academic writing, accounting for 1.8%; 18 students with scores ranging from 12 to 13, accounting for 31.6%; 21 students with scores ranging from 10.5 to 11.5, accounting for 36.8%; 12 students with scores ranging from 9 to 10, accounting for 21.1%; 5 students with scores below 9, accounting for 8.8%.

According to the English final exam results of 2021 Civil Engineering Class 3 and Class 4, among the 45 students, no students scored between 13.5 and 15 in academic writing, and 9 students with a writing score of 12 to 13, accounting for 20%; 21 students with scores ranging from 10.5 to 11.5, accounting for 46.7%; 7 students with scores ranging from 9 to 10, accounting for 15.6%; 8 students with scores below 9, accounting for 17.8%.

Based on the writing scores of the surveyed students coming from different majors, we can see that the academic writing scores of a larger part of the non-English major students are not high. The students who major in Computer Science scored highest among all the students, with half of them scoring above 12 points. Yet, generally speaking, a larger part of the non-English major students need improve their English writing level.

After analyzing the compositions of the test paper, it is clearly seen that in those compositions with a mark below 9 points, there are many grammatical errors, many spelling errors, serious cohesion and coherence problems. Besides, there also exist such problems as monotony of sentence patterns, lack of vivid words and failure to conduct normal expression. Obviously, they did not lay a solid foundation in their junior and senior middle school time. All these show that their English language input is seriously insufficient.

The reading materials in English textbooks are very limited, which results in the deficiency of college students' English input. Without enough input in reading, it is impossible for the output of students to be ideal.

2.1.2 Case Studies of the Composition Samples

Let's choose three compositions, which are respectively from the three score segments of 10.5-11.5 points, 12-13 points and 13.5-15 points, to conduct case studies.

First, let's analyze the composition of a candidate who scored between 10.5 and 11.5 in the writing section of the English final exam. In order to facilitate analysis and intuitive comparison, the entire article is now recorded as follows:

On the Environmental Protection in Our Campus

The environmental protection in our campus is really important, because campus is our big family.

However, our campus still has some environmental problem, such as student throw the rubbish everywhere, destroy the grass and water pollution is caused.

There are two reason of this problems. First of all, the student is so casual about their daily behavior and do not have a resibonsibly heart to our campus, so they throw out the rubbish everywhere , include our lake of campus. Moreover, many student likes have a outdoor meal on our grass of campus. So this activities destory the grass.

In order to settle down this problems, I give two suggests. First of all, the student should pay attention to themselves, not throw the rubbish everywhere. They should throw them to the right area. Moreover, everyone should take care of the grass. Don't have an outdoor meal on the grass anymore

Although the student tried to write complex sentences in grammar, yet the expressions of these sentences are not precise enough, resulting in many grammatical errors, such as putting a sentence behind “such as” instead of a phrase, forgetting using the plural form when writing a plural noun, using “a” instead of “an” before a word that begins with vowel sound, forgetting putting a point at the end of a declarative sentence, subject-predicate inconsistency, inconsistent collocation, and so on. There appear quite a few errors in inconsistent collocation, such as “this activities”, “this problems”, “many student likes have”, “the student is so casual about their daily behavior and do not”, etc. And there are some spelling errors, such as “resibonsibily” (which should be “responsible”), “suggests” (which should be “suggestions”), “include” (which should be “including”), “behavior” (which should be “behavior”), “destory” (which should be “destroy”), etc. And the student also incorrectly uses the phrase “settle down” (which should be “settle” in the sentence) and the phrase “throw out” (which should be “throw” in the sentence). Of course, some errors are resulted from the candidate’s carelessness, yet these errors should have been avoided. These errors will surely cause certain difficulties for readers in understanding.

From the foregoing analysis we can see that the student is still far from mastering English language, for he cannot use English proficiently and perfectly. To further improve his English level, he needs to increase the volume of input in English Language.

Next, let’s analyze the composition of a candidate who scored between 12 points and 13 points in the writing section of the English final exam. In order to facilitate analysis and intuitive comparison, the entire article is now recorded as follows:

On the Environmental Protection in Our Campus

In our campus, there is a large and beautiful lake, It’s called “Xianxi”. However, every time I watch it, there are little rubbish on the water. What’s more, sometimes I can see that there are some paper on the classroom table. And rubbish was threw by student on the street.

So why this phenomement appear in our campus? In my view, the first reason is that we lessly care our environment. We always like to do what we want to do, but we overlook our environment. The second reason is that the environment can’t influence our life more now. So we can not find our environment change day by day.

Therefore, I will give my suggestions for this situation. First, we should call the all students and teachers to know the environment what we live. Then, we can gradually care our environment. Second, we can organize some activities about protecting environment, then we can know how to protecte it. Finally, I want to say this: protect environment is our responsiability.

Compared with the foregoing composition, this one has fewer errors in grammar and in spelling, yet the errors in it still catch the eye. Firstly, grammatical errors. In the first sentence, we can see the punctuation error. When a statement ends, there should be a point at the end of it. Yet, influenced by his own native language, this student uses a comma. There are some other conspicuous grammatical errors,

such as “there are little rubbish”, “there are some paper”, “rubbish was threw”, “why this phenomement appear”, “find our environment change”, “protect environment is...”, “the all students”, “the environment what we live”, etc. Secondly, there are some conspicuous spelling mistakes, such as “phenomement”, “lessly”, “protecte”, and “responsiability”.

In communicating with a native speaker, these errors will affect the effect of communication to some extent. Anyhow, these errors should be avoided in communication. It shows that the student is still not proficient in English. The main reason lies in the deficiency in the input of the English language.

Finally, let’s analyze the composition of a candidate who scored between 13.5 and 15 points in the writing section of the English final exam. In order to facilitate analysis and intuitive comparison, the entire article is recorded as follows:

On the Environmental Protection in Our Campus

Although teachers and students’ awareness of recycling have been raised and much progress have been made, there are still many problems, such as the waste of old clothes and books, the recycle of rubbish and so on.

There are 2 reasons. For one thing, we haven’t realise that our old clothes and books can be recycled and passed to people in need. For another thing, teachers and students don’t know how to classify rubbish correctly, so that the rubbish is throwed in the false bin.

Some of my suggestions are as follows. First, we can set some recycle boxes in our campus and organize some students to teachers and students’ dormitories recycling their clothes which they don’t wear anymore and books they don’t read anymore. Second, we can not only add some recycling classes, but also play some games, helping us learn more recycle ways. I do believe that if we make effort, our campus will be better and better.

In this article there appear a few conspicuous grammatical errors. In the first sentence of the first paragraph, the subjects of the adverbial clause are “awareness” and “progress”, both uncountable nouns. Thus, the auxiliary verb in the predicate part should be in the singular form. Thus, “have been raised” should be “has been raised”, and “have been made” should be “has been made”. And in the second paragraph, “haven’t realise” should be “haven’t realized”, “is throwed” should be “is thrown”, “false bin” should be “wrong bin” and “recycling” should be “recycling”.

The article uses various compound sentence structures. Generally speaking, the student’s mastery of grammar and use of vocabulary are quite OK. And the article uses some unusual vocabulary that can reflect one’s level, such as “awareness”, “recycle”, “classify”, “add” etc. The article revolves around the core theme from beginning to end and expresses clearly and logically. Moreover, the number of the words of this article is 160, reaching the requirement of 150 words. Yet, there still appear a few grammatical errors. And the expression of individual sentences appears somewhat monotonous. It shows that this student’s writing still needs to be improved.

From the foregoing analysis of the three composition samples, it can be concluded that among university students there exists the common problem of insufficiency in writing ability. Even for those who do better than others, there is still a lot of room for improvement. The main reason lies in the deficiency of input in English. To solve this problem, it is imperative for them to increase their reading volume.

2.2 Extensive Reading of British and American Literary Masterpieces

The time of teaching and learning is very limited, especially for non-English majors. It is impossible for students to have enough intake in English class, thus, the deficiency in output is unavoidable. This only way to solve this problem is by doing much extracurricular reading, “above all the ‘good language learner’ is an acquirer, who first of all is able to obtain sufficient intake in the second language, and second, has a low affective filter to enable him to utilize this input for language acquisition” (Krashen, 1981). In English class, “the student who feels at ease in the classroom and likes the teacher may seek out intake by volunteering and may be more accepting of the teacher as a source of intake...In addition, we would expect students with such attitudes to apply themselves more, resulting in more learning” (Krashen, 1981, pp. 23-24). Yet there are always some students, especially those who have not laid a good foundation in English learning in junior or senior middle school time, who are always in a state of anxiety, which will surely affect the input in their English study. And for these students, “classroom anxiety, a high fear of rejection and similar feelings may be related to failure” (Krashen, 1981, p. 29). Thus, to enlarge the volume of reading all by themselves in an environment with a relaxed atmosphere is a good way for them.

“Language learning is visualized as falling into several stages: a first stage to which the audiovisual method is particularly applicable in which the learner becomes familiar with everyday language as defined in français fondamental; a second stage involving the capacity to talk more consecutively on general topics and to read non-specialized fiction and the newspaper; and a third stage involving the use of more specialized discourse of professional and other interests” (Stern, 1983). Reading “non-specialized fiction” is an inevitable road English learners need to take. To write an excellent article, one must have sufficient reading accumulation. It is difficult to write a truly excellent article solely based on writing skills and methods. Only by enhancing the input of reading can university students improve their writing ability. The countermeasure is to assign them the task of reading English literary works.

There are some eminent works in British and American literature for students to choose, such as *Wuthering Heights*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Jane Eyre*, *The Moon and Sixpence*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moby Dick*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Treasure Island*, *The Waste Land*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Martin Eden*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, etc. Shakespeare’s tragedies and comedies are also worth reading, such as his *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. They are never outdated.

Besides, there are some world-famous poets in British and American literature, such as Robert Burns, Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, T. S. Eliot, Whitman, etc. Some of their poems have spread all over the world. Through classic literary works, students can get in touch with rich and beautiful literary language, get to know the fantastic expression ways and master the expression skills. Meanwhile, they can get to know foreign culture and customs. And these world-famous works can arouse students' interest in learning, enhance their confidence in foreign language learning, and reduce or eliminate their anxiety. It will make university students believe that learning a foreign language is a pleasure, not a burden. Through reading these great works, university students can achieve language acquisition unconsciously. In Krashen's view, acquisition is much more effective than learning.

Krashen has proposed "Input Hypothesis" (also called "i+1 Theory"), which is the core of Krashen's acquisition theory, and advocated that language output is a hallmark of second language acquisition. Krashen believes that input should be comprehensible, sufficient, relevant and interesting, and the input theories include visual and auditory input. According to Krashen's "i+1" theory, when conducting information and material input, teachers should choose the language input which is slightly higher than the acceptance level of the students. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, by understanding a language that contains structures that slightly exceed the learner's existing language abilities (i+1), new language structures can be acquired. Students who receive and comprehend language input slightly higher than their own level will produce corresponding language output.

Based on Krashen's "i+1 Theory", College English teachers should take the responsibility of guiding students' reading and assigning them the literary works that suit them. Besides, universities should create conditions for students' English study, such as purchasing the representative masterpieces of world-famous writers to ensure students can get access to them in school library.

Through a large amount of input of excellent language and literature, students will show and enhance their output ability. They will make great progress not only in reading comprehension but also in writing skills and ability. Yet, in the very beginning, they had better begin with works written in simple English. After a period of gradual reading, they can read the literary works in the original. This doing conforms to the law of learning a language. In order to cultivate the ability of writing, to practice more is also necessary. Writing English diary is a good way to practice English writing. Practice makes perfect. Writing English diary is also a way of output. In the course of practice, students will realize the errors that they previously made. And they can correct them all by themselves.

In the process of students' reading learning, the guiding role of teachers cannot be ignored. College English teachers should arrange literary works to guide students in reading based on their learning level at regular intervals. After a period of reading, teachers need to timely evaluate students' reading level by asking them to submit essay assignments or through essay competitions, in order to make plans and arrangements for the next step of writing teaching. And in English class, teachers should promptly point out the regular errors that students make in their essay assignments and essay competitions, in

order to avoid other students from making similar mistakes.

“A goal of education, bilingual or other, presumably is to enable children to develop their capacity for creative use of language as part of successful adaptation of themselves and their communities in the continuously changing circumstances characteristic of contemporary life. And linguistics indeed has already addressed itself to this goal, as witnessed by the concern within descriptive theory for the ‘creative aspect of language use’” (Hymes, 1974). British and American literary works can stimulate students’ interest and enthusiasm in learning, enhance their confidence in English writing, and help them achieve good results. Under the guidance of college English teachers, through the input of literary reading, university students can achieve lexical diversity, flexibility of sentence structure, richness of the content of writing, exquisiteness and elegance of sentence patterns, and vividness of language expression. Gradually and unconsciously, they will be able to achieve the creativity in language use.

3. Conclusion

Based on the foregoing illustration and analysis, it can be concluded that to improve students’ writing ability, the increase in the input of reading is imperative. The extensive reading of British and American literary masterpieces will facilitate the input of English language so as to lay a good foundation for the output in the form of English writing.

As college English teachers, “we cannot really teach language, we can only create conditions in which it will develop spontaneously in the mind in its own way” (Corder, 1981). English teaching and learning should not be confined to classroom. Arranging and directing students’ extracurricular reading is imperative. Under college English teachers’ guidance and direction, and under the necessary conditions created by universities for students’ extracurricular reading, students’ writing ability and communicative ability will be enhanced and will be improved to a higher level.

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Notes

Note 1. Dong WANG (1969-04), male, Han, Born place: Zhengzhou City, Henan Province, Title: Lecturer, Master of English Language and Literature, Research Direction: British and American Literature; English language.