

Reflection on the Teaching of IELTS Writing

Meng Xiong*, Nanzhou Ye, Yan Xiong

Boya International School, Jiangxi University of Technology, Ziyang, Nanchang, China

**Corresponding author: xiongmeng@jxut.edu.cn*

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Abstract: In recent years, educators advocated teachers' reflection on their teaching practice, which has gradually developed into an important teaching activity. Practices have proved that teachers can improve their teaching level through continuous reflection. In this paper, the author introduces the reflection on teaching and offers some ways to improve IELTS writing teaching. Most students have trouble getting higher scores on IELTS writing tasks. Therefore, the reflection on writing teaching is useful to teachers who want to help students perform better in such English exams.

1. Introduction

1.1. Teaching introduction

Young teachers have become the main bearer and backbone of college teaching, and are the key factor affecting the quality of teaching and talent training in colleges and universities. Young teachers generally have high education, vigorous energy, strong ability to accept new things, proficiency in modern education technology. However, there are some common problems among them such as insufficient teaching experience, lack of educational theoretical knowledge, and less teaching research. Therefore, it is important to improve young teachers' teaching level.

Teaching reflection is an effective way for young teachers to improve their teaching skills. The teaching reflection refers to the comprehensive summary of the teaching content, teaching methods, and teaching process after teaching practice to improve the teaching level and promote professional growth. Through teaching reflection, college teachers can grow into teaching-research teachers smoothly and open up the right way to the rapid growth of their careers [1].

1.2. Course introduction

IELTS (International English Language Testing System) is jointly organized by the British Council, DP Education Group and Cambridge University Foreign Language Testing Department. It is a standardized English language proficiency test for those intending to study or work in Commonwealth countries.

IELTS is the leading English proficiency test for many students studying abroad. In recent years, the average score of Chinese IELTS candidates has maintained around 5.6 points, among which the average score of writing is hovering at approximately 5.2 points, the weakest link in the IELTS test. IELTS writing is difficult for most Chinese examinees [2].

2. Reflection on Teaching

2.1. Current situation of English writing teaching

When reading students' compositions, in addition to some errors such as spelling, grammar, and collocation, it was also found that poor content, coherence and lack of consistency were the most prominent problems in students' writing. The root cause of the problems mentioned above, whether a lack of vocabulary or coherence, is the insufficiency of students' language input, which leads to language problems in writing.

On the one hand, due to the excessive division of college English teaching in our country, writing has been independent of reading teaching. Students do not know how to effectively input language by the means of reading and enrich language accumulation. On the other hand, in the writing teaching, teachers lack of dialogue with students, which stifles students' interest in writing, and students' initiative to obtain language input for writing is also lost. Lack of initiative and not knowing how to strengthen language accumulation with the help of language input based on reading are important factors restricting the improvement of students' English writing ability. Therefore, it is a task that teachers must reflect on English writing teaching to strengthen the integration of writing and reading, help students make reasonable use of reading resources, improve writing teaching as well as fully mobilize students' enthusiasm and initiative in writing.

2.2. Teaching methods

Under the guidance of traditional teaching concepts, English teaching focuses on grammar and vocabulary and cultivating students' reading abilities. Teachers and students spend much energy on training language and communicative ability but neglect the cultivation of English writing ability. Most English teachers regard writing as just a test-taking skill to train. Traditional teaching mainly refers to the "Product Approach". This pedagogy focuses on the finished writing, with the teacher providing the sample text, analyzing and explaining. Writing becomes a mechanical process of input and output. Due to the difference in the quality of students, most students enter universities with weak English foundation and poor language learning habits. Moreover, as a result of the quality of teachers, language learning has been simplified to a basic point of getting high grades, not to mention cultivating a better appreciation of language and the perception of the nuances of meaning. Teachers spend a lot of time and energy marking compositions, while students do not read carefully the teacher's comments and revisions, so the same mistakes may occur repeatedly in writing. Hence, methods used in teaching college students need to be altered according to different teaching situations. There are three most representative writing teaching methods.

2.2.1. The Product Approach

The Product Approach regards language learning as "a mechanical habit-forming process" from the perspective of behaviorism [3]. According to this view, language input is the most significant learning motivator because it provides crucial resources for imitation. Accordingly, the emphasis of writing lies in the application of language knowledge. Therefore, the Product Approach pays attention to the language form and emphasizes the correct use of vocabulary and syntax. Students are encouraged to imitate the teacher's model or text in writing repeatedly. Students' writing is evaluated on the basis of whether the writing reflects their knowledge of the language. Therefore, in this writing teaching method, what is highly valued is the finished product of writing rather than the process of writing and students' subjective initiative. Currently, our country's English writing teaching from middle school to college is mainly based on the Product Approach.

2.2.2. The Process Approach

The Process Approach began in the 1960s and was formed by opposing the Product Approach. The reflection and reform of writing teaching triggered by it was called “a paradigm shift” by linguist Hairston (1982) [4]. This writing teaching method transfers the center of writing teaching from the finished writing to the writing process. This method includes generating ideas, collecting data, making a draft, giving feedback, revising the draft, and finalizing the draft. In this method, the role of teachers has also changed from simply providing writing samples and correcting works to enlightening, assisting, and appreciating the writing process.

In addition, language input and normalization are replaced by the skills of spontaneous thinking and communication required in the writing process. The Process Approach swept the language teaching community in the 1980s and gradually promoted to the teaching of a second language, and still dominates the writing teaching method, but it is still in the exploration stage in China.

2.2.3. The Genre Approach

Compared with the Product Approach and the Process Approach, the newer writing method is the Genre Approach. As Bamforth (1993) argued, the Genre Approach holds that writing is based on a specific social environment. It emphasizes the nature that linguistic traditions constrain most discourse, so writing must follow certain fixed patterns. Teachers’ role lies in guiding students to understand a specific discourse community and the corresponding genre [5]. This theory of writing teaching regards an article as a communication channel between the author and the reader. Therefore, the purpose of communication determines the subject matter of the paper and, thus, the grammar and discourse framework used. This writing teaching method is divided into three steps: providing the target genre, collaborating with teachers and students to analyze the genre, and completing the exercise [6].

2.3. Measures to Improve the Effectiveness of College English Writing Teaching

2.3.1. Improving teaching methods

Writing is a kind of written communication, and grammatical ability is a part of communication ability. Grammatical ability is language knowledge, including vocabulary, grammar, and so on. Many students do not have a solid language foundation, unable to express their thoughts clearly in English, so teachers should pay attention to the consolidation and improvement of students’ basic language knowledge when teaching writing, starting from vocabulary and grammar. Many experts and scholars are actively exploring the teaching methods of efficient writing. For example, Yu Su and Lian Yanhua (2006) proposed to adopt the “product-process teaching method” by combining the advantages of the Product Approach and the Process Approach in order to obtain the maximum teaching benefits in the teaching of college English writing [7]. These writing methods should be complementary [8]. Many researchers of second language writing have pointed out that students’ needs should be understood before appropriate writing teaching methods are discussed [9].

In actual teaching, teachers should update their teaching concepts. By explaining the fixed collocation relationship and sentence pattern of certain words, teachers can enable students to know the essentials of sentence formation; by explaining how to expand the paragraph structure, students can understand the writing of paragraphs; by explaining how the body parts are connected, students can master the writing of the text, thereby helping students use these English writing skills in their own writings. In addition, teachers can also carry out a variety of writing exercises in combination with the text. Writing practice, in turn, deepens students’ understanding of the ideological content of the text and mastery of the language points.

2.3.2. Improving composition evaluation methods

The way to correct composition mistakes should be student-centered, and students should be free to find and correct mistakes in writing and revising. By forming this good habit, they know how to improve their writing by learning from each other. Students can correct some common errors by themselves. As we all know, people often learn from mistakes, and so as students. Teachers can use methods such as pairing and mutual correction, group members evaluating each other, and selecting excellent works to give comments. This student-centered way of correcting compositions can make students overcome their psychological inferiority without relying on teachers. When evaluating compositions, teachers should regard writing comments as a way to communicate with students. The emphasis of comments should be placed on the composition's theme, concept, argument, and plot, and the words and sentences used in the comments should be familiar to students. In this way, the method of correcting composition can be accepted by students and encourage students to correct mistakes and improve their ability.

2.3.3. Encouraging students to form effective learning strategies for independent learning

Lite(1991) believes that independent learning is “essentially a problem of learners” psychological relationship to the learning process and learning content, that is, an ability to transcend, critically think and make decisions, as well as act independently. Therefore, he believes that autonomous learning is the ability of learners to control their own learning. More specifically, learners can independently determine their own learning purpose, learning objective, learning content and methods, and their own assessment system. In an autonomous learning environment, learners spontaneously interact with the outside world. Learn to be a “creative process that actively seeks (and even imposes) meaning from events that occur”. In writing teaching, students can be guided to find relevant materials through multimedia for reading on a specific issue, which enriches students' knowledge and provides students with more space for thinking.

3. Conclusion

To sum up, the writing process involves input and output. Students completing a composition is not the ultimate goal of writing teaching. In the writing process, how to help students continuously improve, enhance the interest in writing, and be willing to write, is a difficult task which requires teachers to pay a lot of effort. With the development and improvement of teaching methods, English writing teaching is bound to develop into a new level. Only when the majority of teachers form the habit of reflection on improving their foreign language level, actively engaging in the research of writing teaching, and guiding the teaching practice with theory can the effect of writing teaching to be guaranteed and the purpose of writing teaching can be truly realized.

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