An Exploration of English Writing Teaching Model in Junior Middle School Based on the Hypothesis of "Output Driven- Input Enabled"

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Abstract

At present, in the process of English writing teaching in junior high school, there is a clear imbalance between input and output. English teachers in junior high school pay much more attention to the input, but much less to output, which leads to students' failure in English expression. Therefore, influenced by the hypothesis of "output driven-input enabled", this study conducted a questionnaire survey in junior middle school to know about students' opinions on English writing and reading. Besides, a new teaching model "reading for writing, writing for reading" was put forward according to junior high school students' actual English level, the results of questionnaire and the guidance of theory.

Keywords

Output-driven; Input-enabled; Junior middle school; English writing teaching model.

1. Introduction

According to the English Curriculum standards for compulsory Education (2021), the overall goal of English courses in the stage of basic English teaching is to cultivate students' comprehensive language ability, among which writing skill is one of the basis of comprehensive language ability. In English learning, writing, as the activity of output, directly reflects the students' comprehensive language ability. However, the current situation of writing teaching in the junior high school is not optimistic. On the one hand, there is a serious imbalance between input and output in the current English teaching. We may find that a considerable number of teachers only focus on two points: whether students' writings can reach the format standard or not; whether students' writing letters can be clear to see or not. While few teachers concentrate on the language level of students' writings. However, their teaching methods are old and inflexible, which cannot improve students' writing ability fundamentally. On the other hand, in the actual classroom teaching, practices are difficult to be effectively implemented due to the constraints of class time and maneuverability. Therefore, students' writing teaching tends to be roughly processed as after-class homework, which cannot be valued by language teachers and learners. As traditional teaching method cannot promote students' writing motivation and writing ability, the English teaching reform is needed promptly to break through the current situation.

The "output-driven, input-enabled" hypothesis put forward by Wen Qiufang in 2014 clearly throws light on the relationship between input and output, which can be applied into English writing teaching as the new scientific teaching method. This hypothesis mainly serves to improve for senior foreign language learners. However, the author believes that the hypothesis or approach can also do good for junior English teaching. In China, English teachings in junior middle school tend to be test-oriented under the pressure of Entrance Examination for secondary school. In this case, English teachers in junior middle school pay more attention to

input, but less to output, which is not conductive to build students' correct consciousness of English learning and cultivate students' good habit of English learning. For junior middle school students who are in the basic stage of English learning, laying a solid foundation of English is a necessary and important task needs to be completed. Obviously, it cannot be realized easily if students only attach importance to English input. In order to solve this problem, this research attempts to explore and construct new scientific and optimal method of English writing teaching in junior high school education based on the "output-driven, input-enabled" hypothesis.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Basis

The "output-driven, input-enabled" hypothesis was come up with by Wen Qiufang based on some old theories, including Krashen' input hypothesis and Swain's output hypothesis. Input hypothesis put forward by Krashen in 1980s is of great significance to the development of second language acquisition. Then, it developed into comprehensible input "i+1": "i" refers to learner's present level of language competence, while "i+1" represents slightly higher level that learner will reach after receiving comprehensible input for a long time. In the theory of comprehensible input, language learners should be exposed to language knowledge and forms that are slightly beyond their current level of competence and their understanding [1]. However, this hypothesis overstates the role of input as it considers comprehensible input as the only way to acquire language. In order to make up for the defects of Krashen' Comprehensible Input, Swain put forward The Output Hypothesis in 1985 on the basis of research he made on French immersion teaching. Swain holds that comprehensible input is the prerequisite of second language acquisition rather than sufficient condition [2]. Therefore, it is not enough for learners to acquire language only by language input. Learners must be given opportunities to put theory into practice and ensure the accuracy of language forms. That is called "comprehensive output hypothesis".

In 2014, Wen Qiufang proposed "output-driven, input-enabled hypothesis" through combing Krashen' input hypothesis with Swain's output hypothesis. The new hypothesis clearly defines the relationship between input and output, in which output is taken as both the driven force and the goal of language acquisition, while input is the method to promote the completion of output tasks [5]. In order to apply the hypothesis into actual English teaching class, Wen (2014) combined the "output-driven, input-enabled" hypothesis with Tyler's four elements of curricula framework held in 1949. Four elements are respectively objective, contents, organization and assessment.

2.2. Previous Studies

Following Wen's research, lots of educators and teachers in China carried out related English teaching class at the centre of the above four curricula elements. In the meantime, they try to come up with new models and methods based on the new hypothesis and then testify it through doing teaching experiments. Wang &Zhao (2015) tried to look for some new ideas about college English teaching reform from the "output-driven, input-enabled" hypothesis. The author concluded four points in total: 1) Balance the relationship between input and output in teaching. 2) Optimize course settings, including the shift from the single-skilled course settings. 3) Innovate and reform the teaching methods. 4) Build a "double-qualified" professional teaching team [4]. Wang (2016) carried out an action research on the integration of reading and writing teaching based on "output driven - input enabled". The research is divided into two stages: the first stage is initial action intervention aimed at students' low efficiency in reading and writing; In the second stage, the action plan will be revised according to problems occurred in the initial

action intervention [3]. The empirical research and teaching method or model exploration about this hypothesis mainly focus on college English class and senior high school class, while few explorations are seen in English teaching of beginners or lower lever learners. For second language learners, the terminal purpose of learning foreign language is to apply this language individually. That is to say, output activities cannot be ignored due to the difficulty of realization for beginners and lower level learners. In view of this, this study will try to find a suitable way or a model of English writing teaching for junior middle school students based on the hypothesis of "output-driven,input-enabled ".

3. Questionnaire on the Situation of English Writing of Junior Middle School Students

3.1. Data Collection

In order to know about junior middle school students' attitudes and views on English writing teaching and relationship between English writing and reading, questionnaires were distributed to 300 students from Grade seven, Grade eight and Grade nine in Taizhou fuzhong Middle school and all questionnaires were handed in. Every grade will be selected 100 students randomly to complete the questionnaire. The purpose of questionnaire is designed to understand students' current situations about writing, including writing interests, writing confidence, and writing consciousness such as approach of practicing writing and understanding of relationship between input and output. The questionnaire was presented as multiple choice questions and its content includes students' writing interest, writing difficulties, self-evaluation of English learning and the like. To ensure the data from questionnaire are true and valid, each answer is fully explained to help students understand the meaning of option so that students can give true and effective answers and feedback.

Table 1. Questionnaire on the Situation of English Writing of Junior Middle School Students

Title	Questionnaires	A	B	C	D
1	Are you interested in English writing?	15%	22%	37%	26%
2	Do you like English teachers' writing teaching methods?	13%	20%	40%	27%
3	Do you have confidence in learning English writing well?	19%	24%	30%	27%
4	Do you think writing helps you learn English?	30%	33%	12%	25%
5	When faced with difficulties in English writing, how do you solve the problems?	19%	28%	22%	31%
6	How do you usually practice English writing?	20%	42%	12%	26%
7	How did you start writing?	33%	13%	25%	29%
8	Do you think English reading helps your English writing?	11%	21%	36%	32%
9	What do you think of the main purpose on English reading?	28%	41%	19%	12%
10	What do you think of your English reading level?	21%	32%	26%	21%
11	What do you think of your English writing level?	15%	23%	29%	33%

3.2. Analysis of the Questionnaire

In the table above, Q1 and Q2 focus on students' writing interest. It seems that current English writing teaching cannot motivate students' writing interest as only 37% students take interest in writing while 63% students not. Q3 is designed to see students' confidence on English writing. The data shows that few students are confident in learning of English writing as only 43% holds positive attitude towards this question.

From Q4 to Q11, the emphasis is put on students' writing consciousness. The English writing consciousness in this research refers to students' value and understanding on English writing

and methods they use to practice English writing. Q4 and Q5 are asked to see whether students attach importance to English writing. The results show that most students believe that learning English writing is helpful to learn English as the data reaches to 63%. However, when they have difficulties in writing, a lot of students hold negative attitudes toward the solution as 28% only choose to wait for teachers' explanation and 31% decide not to do anything. Q6 and Q7 concentrate on how do students practice English writing. We may find that most students do not know how to improve their English writing, because 42% students exercise writing skills only by reciting example from exam paper. From Q8 to Q11, understandings about English writing are paid attention to. These questions are mainly designed to know students' understanding of relationship between reading and writing. It can be indicated from the result that most students have not developed correct opinions and habits of learning English writing currently. What's more, the data from Q10 and Q11 shows the learning imbalance between input and output, which need to be improved.

The specific questions and multiple choices are shown in the Appendix. From the data and discussion above, it is safe to say that students lack the proper awareness and good habit on English writing under the guidance of traditional English writing method.

4. English Writing Teaching Model in Junior Middle School

In view of the results of questionnaire above, this study tries to set a instruction model based on the "output-driven, input-enabled" hypothesis--- "reading for writing, writing for reading". The hypothesis put forward by Wen is used for language teaching instruction and mainly targeted at intermediate and advanced learners [5]. However, author believes that this hypothesis can also be applied into the language learners who have mastered basic language knowledge and basic language skills. This hypothesis have clarified the relationship between input and output and explained how to integrate input with output, which is an indispensable part for any English learning stage. The details of model are designed according to English textbook for junior middle school students from Yilin press, which is suitable for the level of students from junior middle school. Specific procedures are as following:

1. Lead-in. At first, teacher presents interesting video or starts a discussion about the topic they will learn to motivate students' learning interests. Then, teacher sets a clear writing goal for students through "Brainstorming" activity. Students will find the difficulties in English writing through participating "Brainstorming" so as to promote their desires of reading.
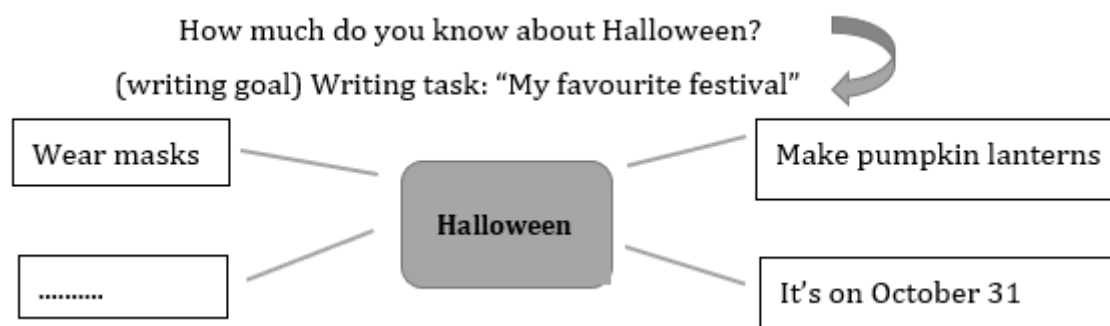

Figure 1. Sample:(Brainstorm)

2. Reading activity. After stimulating students' reading motivation, teacher provides relevant reading materials. Students will learn what they want, like vocabulary, sentence patterns, article structure and related information under teachers' instruction. Through taking reading materials as the example, students will know what is a good writing and try to find out how to write an article. At the end of reading activity, teacher will make a conclusion about the reading

materials by presenting a writing framework. The purpose of this step is to help students find out the articles structure and make the preparation for the next writing stage. Except for this, teacher should try to cultivate students' awareness gradually that reading is helpful to the writing in this process.

Figure 2. Sample: Work out Wendy's writing plan

This sample is a framework, also can be called writing plan, made out according to the reading article about Halloween. Students will clearly understand the structure of article as it can be seen in the sample that the article is written from five parts: what, when, where, who and why. After that, they will know how to set about the writing "My favourite festival." through imitating the writing method of example.

3. Writing activity. Under the guidance of reading materials, teacher leads students to think about their writings by asking some questions and helping them make their own writing framework. After that, teacher asks students to complete the writing task. For example, in the writing "My favourite festival", students can choose one festival that they like best such as Spring Festival at first, then try to list several points about this festival from five elements: what, when, where, who and why, which has learned from reading materials. After finishing their writing framework, students can complete their writing on their own according to their framework. During this period, students will understand the importance of reading through writing their own articles.

4. Assessing. After students finish the first draft, teacher can choose a student's writing to analyze and evaluate, which tells students how to correct English writings. Considering limited English level of junior middle school students, the requirements on students' writing will be low at the start, then slowly increase the writing standard with the improvement of students' writing level. The author suggests the assessment system can be divided into three stages. 1) focus on writings' format, clear font, words spelling and basic grammar. 2) focus on writings' language expression. 3) focus on writings' content and article structure. Therefore, when teachers evaluate the writing in the class, their analysis can covers these aspects, but put emphasis on some according to each stage. After that, students correct their writings through self-evaluation and peer-evaluation.

5. Assignment. After class, teacher can encourage students to look for related reading material so that they can improve their writing through reading more. The reading after writing will be

no longer slow and aimless, but conscious and purposeful. Students will know what to read and how to read after writing training, which achieves the goal that writing for reading. In the meantime, homework can be assigned to students, helping them understand the relationship between reading and writing and promoting writing skills.

The homework can be designed as follows: one reading material is provided as an example at first in the paper for students to practice English calligraphy by coping and learn how to write about this kind of topic. Then, a writing task with the related or the same topic is required to be finished in the paper below. Taking account of junior middle school students' limited language level and teacher' limited energy and time, this writing task can offer Chinese or some clues to help students complete the writing. During the process of writing, students can imitate some English expressions from the reading material above to complete their writings.

The whole teaching procedure is to complete a circle: At first, take writing as the objective and driven force, then, read various materials to meet the desire of writing, at last, finish the writing at the help of reading. Input and output get the balance in this teaching procedure.

5. Conclusion

In terms of English learners, input and output should not be separated from each other, no matter what levels they are in. From the analysis of questionnaire which are aimed at investigating students' writing interest, attitudes and consciousness under the traditional teaching method, a serious shortage of language output can be seen in junior middle school students. In this condition, it is necessary for teachers and educational reformers to find a new English writing teaching mode that can solve this problem.

Besides, cultivating students' correct sense and habit of language learning is more important than teaching knowledge simply, as a saying goes: "Give people a fish and you feed them for a day. Teach them how to fish and you feed them for a lifetime.". This new teaching mode based on 'output-driven, input-enabled' hypothesis is helpful to understand the relationship between reading and writing, naturally developing students' sense and habit of language learning. In the meantime, students would find the gap between what they want to write and what they actually expressed through writing, which would promote them to read more. In this way, the ability and habit of independent learning are cultivated unconsciously.

In fact, it is not easy for teachers to ensure the teaching led by new mode an effective classroom as students' classroom performance and development of writing ability are influenced by many factors. In the case, preparing a excellent writing class need to take a lot of time and energy. How to alleviate the efforts of lesson preparation and optimize the efficiency of lesson preparation is one of the challenges of teaching, which need to be explored further.

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Appendix Questionnaire on the Situation of English Writing in Junior Middle School Students

1. Are you interested in English writing?

A. very interested in B. interested in C. not very interested in D. not interested in

2. Are you interested in English teachers' writing teaching methods?

A. very interested in B. interested in C. not very interested in D. not interested in

3. Are you confidence of learning English writing well?

A. Very confident B. confident C. a little bit D. not confident

4. Do you think writing helps you learn English ?

A. very helpful B. somewhat helpful C. not helpful D. I don't know

5. When faced with difficulties in English writing, how do you solve the problems?

A. consult teachers first (including private tutors) B. put it aside and wait for the teacher's explanation C. read relevant reference materials by myself or discuss with partners to learn from each other D. have negative emotions and try to ignore them

6. How do you usually practice English writing?

A. seek help from teachers B. recite and imitate model essay C. read English Journals D. others

7. How did you start writing?

A. first think in Chinese, then translate B. write the outline first C. write directly without any preparation D. don't know how to start

8. Do you think English reading helps your English writing?

A. very helpful B. somewhat helpful C. not helpful D. I don't know

9. What do you think of the main purpose on English reading?

A. get information B. complete exam questions C. learn grammar D. learn expressions in foreign language

10. What do you think of your English reading level?

A. very good B. good C. medium D. poor

11. What do you think of your English writing level?

A. very good B. good C. medium D. poor