

A Study on the Reading-Writing Combined English Instruction in Junior High School Based on Thematic Contexts

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Abstract—Context is an effective way for students to master English and a crucial method to stimulate their interest in learning. This paper tries to explore a teaching strategy that combines reading and writing in English based on thematic contexts through practical teaching cases. The first step is to activate students' background information by creating thematic contexts; the second step is to integrate necessary textual information for writing around thematic contexts; the next step is to explore thematic contexts to broaden students' reading perspectives and overcome their limitations in thinking; the last step is to apply thematic contexts to improve the comprehensive use of reading and writing skills. The reading-writing combined English instruction based on thematic contexts can achieve the goal of coordinated and high-quality development of students' English reading and writing abilities.

Keywords—reading-writing combined English instruction, thematic contexts, reading for writing

I. INTRODUCTION

National English Curriculum Standard for General Senior High School (hereinafter referred to as the Curriculum Standard) proposes that the content of English courses serves as the foundation for developing students' core literacy in English. Thematic context is one of the six key elements of English course content, and it is the first and foremost element [1]. It is also pointed out that the theme provides the scope or context for language learning and effective language learning activities should be carried out in a certain thematic context. Thematic context not only regulates the scope of language and cultural knowledge, but also provides a meaningful context for language learning, and organically penetrates emotions, attitudes and values. The degree of students' understanding of thematic contexts and discourse has a direct impact on their thinking development and the effectiveness of language learning.

The reading-writing combined English instruction is an effective way to improve students' comprehensive language skills. Reading for writing increases students' motivation levels and is an effective strategy for promoting the development of their writing and thinking skills [2]. Students can accumulate materials, develop a sense of English and understand the structure of the discourse through reading, and then realize the writing skills, effectively extending the reading instruction. To summarize, reading can promote writing, but it requires effective teaching.

At present, there are three problems in the practice of the reading-writing combined English instruction in junior high

school. Firstly, reading and writing teaching lacks thematic guidance, and reading for writing is regarded as a superficial imitation of reading materials. Secondly, reading and writing teaching lacks the overall consideration of the theme, cutting off the close link between reading and writing lessons. Thirdly, reading and writing teaching focuses too much on vocabulary and sentence structure thus lacks the training of students' innovative thinking. This paper attempts to explore in-depth strategies of reading-writing combined English instruction based on thematic contexts, with the objective of fully leveraging the bridging, guiding, and integrating roles of thematic contexts in reading and writing instruction. It strives to enhance students' interest and confidence in the integration of reading and writing, achieve a deep integration between reading and writing, and ultimately elevate students' core literacy in English.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Krashen suggested that a large amount of comprehensible input is an essential condition for language acquisition, and that it is optimal to have language input that is slightly above the learner's current language proficiency [3]. Swain added that relying solely on comprehensible input is not sufficient for second language learners to use the language accurately and fluently [4]. Successful second language learners need to be exposed to a large amount of comprehensible input as well as produce comprehensible output. Input and output are two inseparable and crucial aspects in language acquisition. Input is only a necessary condition, not a sufficient one. Learners need to further internalize the corresponding language structures based on input to complete the entire process of acquisition. Reading is the core aspect of input, while writing is an important aspect of output. So the integration of reading and writing is one of the ways to combine input and output.

The reading-writing combined English instruction is a popular mode of writing teaching under the guidance of information processing theory, which skillfully combines the instruction of reading and writing, emphasizing not only the input of information, but also the selection, organization, storage and use of the input information. It not only strengthens students' understanding of reading and accumulation of language knowledge, but also creates opportunities for students to use language in writing, which is an effective extension of reading teaching.

Thematic contexts, as a means of organizing and guiding language learning, have been increasingly recognized for their potential in enhancing the effectiveness of reading-

writing combined instruction. However, despite the growing interest in this approach, there remain significant gaps in our understanding of its optimal implementation and impact. Just as mentioned before, there remains three problems in the practice of the reading-writing combined English instruction in junior high school. This paper endeavors to tackle these challenges by delving into effective strategies for combining reading and writing in English instruction, particularly in the context of thematic frameworks. By harnessing the bridging, guiding, and cohesive functions of thematic contexts in reading and writing pedagogy, we aspire to foster students' enthusiasm and assurance in integrating these two skills. In this pursuit, we seek to establish a profound integration between reading and writing, enabling students to leverage their comprehension of themes to enrich their writing, and conversely, utilize their writing skills to deepen their understanding of themes.

III. PRINCIPLES AND MATERIALS

The reading-writing combined English instruction based on thematic contexts is supposed to follow three principles. First, the establishment of the thematic context should be related to students' life experiences [5]. Teachers should create contexts that are closely related to the theme of this unit, emphasize the use of language in reality and advocate the life-oriented approach in language teaching. The setting of theme context should be closely related to students' living environment, learning interests and characteristics of the times, so that students can know what to write and express themselves fully. Teachers should take the problems that students are interested in life as the starting point, and stimulate students' thinking through brainstorming to help them learn to solve problems with language. Second, the creation of thematic contexts should align with students' cognitive development level. Context creation should be based on students' learning conditions and in line with their cognitive development level. Before creating a context, teachers should carefully study the content of the teaching materials of this unit, search for learning materials related to the topic, build a knowledge system relevant to the topic and expand students' background reading knowledge, so as to make full preparation for the subsequent writing teaching output. Only by creating a context that meets students' cognitive development level can teachers better promote students' understanding and expression of language knowledge in the thematic context, and deepen understanding of the theme meaning. Last, the application of thematic context should focus on the overall combination between reading and writing. When designing classes, teachers should make sure thematic contexts holistic and stable. Teachers should create an overall context around the central theme throughout the unit, and establish a high-quality combination between writing and reading with a unified context. Each unit of the reading materials in the textbook have own specific theme and storyline. When teaching, teachers are required to guide students to fully understand the unit theme, and connect the textbook and expand the reading materials with the help of unit theme. Teachers can create several sub-contexts related to the thematic context for writing, and lead students to construct

meaning between reading and writing in the context.

IV. PRACTICE AND DISCUSSION

The instruction based on thematic contexts is divided into two phases: reading instruction and writing instruction. The process of reading instruction can be further divided into three parts: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. In pre-reading, teachers use multimodal materials such as pictures, songs, and videos to create a thematic context and activate students' thinking. In while-reading, teachers should be good at asking questions, organizing brainstorming activities, and integrating the textual information needed for writing. In post-reading, teachers need to extend the content of the theme, guide students to think deeply, and broaden their reading horizons by adding texts and drawing mind maps. The writing instruction can also be divided into three steps: first, teachers should create a writing context and clarify the writing requirements; second, teachers should design writing tasks around the relevant thematic meanings; and third, teachers should guide students to form writing motivation and ideas based on the textual knowledge obtained from reading, and complete the writing output.

This paper takes the first unit of the eighth grade volume of junior high school English textbook published by People's Education Press as an example to elaborate on how to carry out the reading-writing combined English instruction based on thematic contexts. The title of this unit is "Where Did You Go on Vacation?", and the reading text is Jane's Diaries. The text mainly presents the information of Jane's vacation in Penang, Malaysia, including characters, weather, scenic spots, activities, encountered problems, feelings, etc., which helps readers experience the exotic charm of Penang and understand the cultural relationship between Penang and Chinese history. With travel as its main theme, this unit guides students to discuss the cities they have visited during their vacation, use the learned language knowledge to narrate their own travel experiences and feelings, aiming to enable students to understand the topic of travel from multiple perspectives based on their life experiences, introduce cities in various aspects, stimulate students' motivation to express, and explore the meaning of the topic.

First, teachers need to create a thematic context, induce thoughts before reading and activate students' background knowledge. Students feel, experience and perceive the real language in the context, and learn and use the language on this basis [6]. Theme of the unit is not only the starting point of context creation and the entry point of meaning inquiry, but the link that integrates the learning materials and the main line that leads the meaning inquiry. In the teaching process of reading for writing, teachers should first set the writing topic of the unit and create relevant contexts to help students awaken their existing life experiences and prepare them for subsequent language learning.

To successfully create a thematic context, here are two steps to follow. One is to introduce thematic contexts to stimulate students' thinking. In lead-in part, in order to activate students' background knowledge, teachers should create contexts related to students' life experiences with the

theme of the unit to promote the development of students' thinking ability. After clarifying the content of the unit theme, teachers can use stories, videos, songs and other multimodal means to create contexts related to the theme and connect the content of the textbook with student' life experience, thus expand their cognition and activate their thinking. The other is to encourage independent expression and activate existing experience. When creating contexts, teachers place learning activities in the background of students' real lives, allowing them to explore problems based on their own life experiences and language proficiency, thereby stimulating their desire to express. Teachers can also provide background knowledge materials to expand students' perspectives of expression, promote the construction of their knowledge systems, and broaden their thinking scope.

Second, teachers needs to center around the thematic context, raise questions in reading and integrate the textual information needed for writing. In reading instruction, teachers can create a series of questions centered around the thematic context and connected to students' lives, forming the problem chain to guide students to effectively solve problems through independent exploration. Teachers can pose questions and inquiries during reading instruction, guiding students to think and answer the questions, and further stimulate their interest in learning, build the framework needed for writing, finally deepen their understanding of thematic meaning, and promote the development of their thinking abilities in the process. Then teachers should sort out textual information based on the questions. When designing questions around the thematic context, teachers should take into account both the textual materials and students' life experiences. They can guide students to predict the content of the text with the help of illustrations and other visual aids, grasp the textual information, and delve deeply into the thematic meaning. Teachers should utilize effective questions to lead students in interpreting the text, cultivate their awareness of problem exploration, and encourage them to learn to think while sorting out information, thereby expanding the depth of learning. After that, teachers can turn to mind maps to extract textual information. Mind maps can present key information in an integrated, hierarchical, and visual way, which helps improve the efficiency of textual information integration and promote the visualization of students' thinking. With the aid of mind maps, students can sort out key knowledge, form a knowledge framework, and enhance their overall understanding of the content. Mind maps can also assist students in extracting important information from the text and integrating relevant information based on the writing topic, thereby enhancing their effective understanding of thematic texts and improving the efficiency of teaching and learning.

Third, teachers are supposed to explore the thematic context to transfer knowledge and breakthrough the limitations of students' reading thinking after reading. To awaken students' life experiences and promote their improvement in language, culture, thinking, and learning abilities, teachers should select extended reading texts with the same theme as the textbooks and help students understand them. To achieve it, teachers should first

supplement reading materials to open up the limits of students' thinking. Teachers should select extended reading materials based on the text and in consideration of students' cognitive level. The reading material should match the thematic context and enrich the theme in terms of language and content, enabling students to summarize and integrate knowledge in the process of enriching their reading experience, broadening their reading horizons, breaking through their thinking limitations, and urging them to appreciate the role of the expressive forms of extended texts in expressing thematic meanings. Then teachers should integrate various texts to construct a thematic expression framework. The reading-writing combined English instruction based on thematic contexts requires teachers to focus on the thematic context. Teachers should base on diverse reading, integrate textbook texts to enable students to effectively absorb language information from different levels in the reading texts [7]. Teachers should guide students to extend, analyze, and summarize the content of the texts, and construct a textual framework. The aim is to cultivate students' systematic thinking ability and the ability to use multiple information for text writing, and to achieve the writing purpose of helping foreign friends better understand the local customs and traditions of China's tourist cities.

Four, teachers are supposed to apply thematic contexts, promote writing through reading, and enhance comprehensive reading and writing abilities. The reading-writing combined English instruction follows the laws of language learning: by creating contexts related to real life, it stimulates students' desire to express, provides them with writing frameworks, and allows them to have something to express and write [8]. Writing output is an important approach for students to deeply construct thematic meaning, apply thematic contexts, and improve their writing skills. It is a process of deep processing and full internalization of knowledge, which not only helps students consolidate and retain knowledge, but also enhances their comprehensive ability of reading and writing. To achieve it, teachers should first create writing context to stimulate students' expression motivation. In the post-reading phase, teachers should create writing contexts and strive to use real contexts for task-driven learning to promote the expression of thematic meanings. Students will bring the textual information and discourse frameworks they have independently constructed into the writing context, thus forming a writing motivation based on the thematic context. Then teachers can provide a draft of writing outline to generate writing ideas. Through the use of textbooks and expanded reading materials, teachers can guide students to pay attention to the framework and theme sentences of texts, generate writing ideas, and refine the structure of the writing text [9]. Based on the teacher's guidance in helping students summarize and generalize writing information, students acquire rich textual materials and discourse framework. Through steps such as clarifying writing requirements, conceiving the layout of the article, introducing the writing outline, and generating writing ideas, students can attempt to complete the draft of their writing. Last, teachers are required to implement diverse evaluations to promote knowledge internalization. Evaluation is a necessary means to improve students'

writing skills, as well as a process for students to sort out their writing frameworks, revise their writing content in time, and enhance their writing expression abilities [10]. Evaluation should be diversified, including teacher evaluation, student self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and so on. Student self-evaluation and peer evaluation can help students promptly identify problems and easily check errors in their writing, thereby enhancing their metacognitive abilities in writing. Teachers should summarize common issues in students' writing and address them promptly. Effective implementation of diverse evaluation is conducive to students' independent exploration and knowledge construction, promoting the internalization of writing-related knowledge and the enhancement of abilities.

V. CONCLUSION

The reading-writing combined English instruction based on thematic contexts is a crucial aspect of current new curriculum teaching design, and an important method for students to learn independent exploration, transfer, and innovation in writing. In teaching practice, teachers should fully leverage the bridging role of thematic contexts to guide students in independently exploring thematic meanings and achieving a comprehensive improvement in their overall language proficiency.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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