



Strategies on Continuation Writing for Students' English Achievement

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Abstract:

The methods of traditional language writing from words and phrases to sentence structures without inner thought of the learners make students bored with studies and inactive in language activities, thus resulting in the ineffectiveness of language application. Continuation Writing was put forward to improve students' language application by leading students to plot their own stories according to the given context, to make language learning meaningful and exciting for them. Many researches have witnessed its positive effects on students' English achievement. For all that, the introduction of Continuation Writing in the reform of National Matriculation English Test (NMET) in China triggers discussion at various levels. Their concerns mainly center on the practical strategies of this method. By employing the method of combining theory with practice, questionnaire and interview, the authors compared the statistics before and after the strategy training. They proved the effects of Continuation Writing strategies in improving students' interest in English and English writing, and raising the chances of students' participation in English activities.

Key words: Continuation Writing, NMET, Practical Strategies, English Achievement

INTRODUCTION

In traditional language teaching, teachers follow the methods from phonetics to words, phrases to sentence structures. Students are trained to enlarge their vocabularies and sentence patterns by remembering them mechanically to master the writing skills and use them in fixed content and format. Students under this system cannot achieve active thinking or positive participation in language activities, thus finding it bored and sometimes even useless in expressing themselves. In the long term, students suffer significant language barriers in practical application. To deal with these drawbacks, there sprung up a variety of methods in the language educational world in China, with the Continuation Writing by professor Wang Chuming from Guangdong University of Foreign Studies as the most outstanding representation.

The significance and development of Continuation Writing

The Continuation Writing proposed by Professor Wang Chuming is a kind of method combining reading and writing. He contended that this method of language acquisition has exceptional

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advantages. He further claimed that the method reflects an integration of imitation and creation, learning and application, and hence can effectively promote language learning (2012).

Later, the method was also-promoted in the College Entrance English Examination in Zhejiang Province. In 2020, the continuation method was further advocated in China. In 2021, it has become an indispensable method of teaching and learning in NMET in Jiangsu, Hebei, Liaoning, Fujian, Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong, and Chongqing. To be vivid, an example of this question type is mentioned (refer to Appendix I).

The abilities needed for Continuation Writing

English writing in NMET is a comprehensive embodiment of students' language ability. The setting of the Continuation Writing adds to the difficulty based on the original Practical Writing.

One example of the Continuation Method in teaching writing is that it requires students to understand an incomplete article of about 300 words, and then write two more paragraphs according to the suggestive sentence at the beginning of each paragraph to complete the article. It not only examines the students' comprehension of the prompt section, but also inspects students' grasp of the theme and style of the whole article. It further requires students to have certain logical thinking, summarizing ability, and creative thinking.

Only with these abilities students, in a limited time, can create two consecutive paragraphs with a coherent logic and consistent writing style with the previous text, to have a complete article with a prominent theme and strong integrity.

The novelty of the study

The Continuation Writing has been considered as a practical approach to improve students' language acquisition. Since it is brand new to students, practical strategies rather than theoretical ones are badly needed at present. Although some studies focused on Continuation Writing, A few research studies focused on the strategies for effective execution of this kind of writing, especially those practical ones that can be applied by students freely and conveniently.

This study addresses this gap and the lack of previous studies on this topic, and proposes to help students acquire English language more effectively and efficiently. This study presents some practical strategies for Continuation Writing, refers to relevant literature on students' current situation, and employs comparative analysis to make the study more scientific and practical. Furthermore, the author strives to give some suggestions, which are effective for the students, and beneficial for all other students aspiring to acquire writing skills in the target language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theories of Continuation Writing

American scholar Swain (1985) put forward the "output hypothesis", that is, learners must employ an understandable amount of output of "speaking" and "writing" to internalize language knowledge and improve language ability. Chinese Professor Wang Chuming (2004) explored the concept of "length writing" or "continuation writing", thinking that good English language is acquired by writing more and longer. Qiufang (2014), who put forward the "output-driven hypothesis", considered output as the driving force and the language acquisition goal. All these above mentioned

researchers agreed that Continuation Writing after reading, driven by "writing", is one of the most effective methods to drive the comprehension of a foreign language and achieve the goal of language acquisition.

The benefits of Continuation Writing

As a new language acquisition method proposed in 2012, Continuation Method in writing is still in its infancy. The researchers continue to use theoretical research and empirical research to prove its benefits in language learning. The main representatives are Professor Wang Chuming (2012,2013,2014) and scholars from Guangdong University of Foreign Studies.

Continuation Method in writing can improve writing language. For example, Jiang Lin and Chen Jin (2015) conducted an empirical study on the influence of Continuation Method on developing accuracy, complexity, and fluency of writing language by using the control variable method. They conducted a control experiment in four first-year English Majors of a university. The final results show that Continuation Method effectively improved the accuracy, fluency, and complexity of writing.

Continuation Writing can produce synergistic effects in English language. Wang Chuming conducted a survey (2012,2015), in which two college English classes were selected as subjects. One group wrote something about the plot of a renowned movie, and the other group described an event happening at home in English. In this experiment, the former was related to English experience, while the latter was related to Chinese experience. The results show that the composition pertaining English experience can produce synergistic effect in English language with less Chinglish.

And Wang Chuming and Qi Luxia (2013) researched the four aspects of scoring reliability, rating scale, difficulty, and synchronic validity to test the feasibility of Continuation Writing as a question type in the test. In this experiment, the reliability and validity of the Continuation Writing were preliminarily tested, and the results are positive.

Except for the research studies above, studies on the strategies for Continuation Writing are few or excessively theoretical. That's why this thesis comes into being. Above all, the previous studies mainly focus on the necessities and benefits of Continuation Writing, which provide the theoretical bases and support materials for this study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applies the method of combining theories with practice to summarize the practical strategies for Continuation Writing.

Based on the theories of "output hypothesis"(Swain,1985), "length writing" (Chuming, 2004) and "output-driven hypothesis"(Wen Qiufang,2014), the authors collected the materials on this question type in College Entrance English Examinations in Zhejiang Province from 2016 to 2020. The relevant exercise materials guide students first to write, then to appreciate the good articles and discuss about the writing methods, and finally get what is called "practical strategies", which was then put into full use to train students' skills on this question type to prove its effectiveness and practicability.

Such a combination of theories and practice proves vital in science research, and an eternal truth in language learning. However, this methodology must be combined with a comparative analysis to prove the validity of these strategies summarized from the practice. To ensure a vivid and explicit application of these strategies, an article of this question type in the appendix was employed as an example, which is also an embodiment of combining theory with practice.

To test the practicability of the Strategies in Continuation Writing, a questionnaire is applied before and after the training, respectively. With the title *Questionnaire on Students' Situation in Continuation Writing*, this questionnaire contains six questions. The first 5 are multiple-choice questions, asking mainly about students' interest in English and English writing, students' participation in English activities and their attitudes towards Continuation Writing. The sixth question is a free-response on the skills of Continuation Writing, to which students can answer according to their mind (see appendix II). By comparing the changes of the answers between the two times' questionnaires, the practicability of the strategies can be evidently seen.

English writing part in the test is a subjective question. When marking, different teachers may give different grades to the same article, according to the content, language expressions, and neatness of the handwriting. To get an accurate answer, an interview is carried out to the marking experts in NMET. The experts will be asked the following two questions:

Question 1: What are the most important factors affecting students' grade in English writing?

Question 2: What is the difference for the different grades on the same writing article?

To avoid the extreme students who are supreme good or bad in English writing, the participants are just 56 average students from the same class. They will accept the training of the strategies of Continuation Writing to offer the basis of the feasibility of the strategies.

Strategies of Continuation Writing

The appearance of this new question type makes many students helpless and they don't know where to start, or how to ensure the consistency between the former given paragraphs and the latter Continuation written paragraphs in the requirements and keep the theme prominent, let alone write two continual paragraphs with about 150 words and secure high marks. Through a combination of theories and practice, the practical strategies for Continuation Writing were realized. By comparative analysis of different answers to the former and the latter two periods of the questionnaires, it was found that students using these strategies can get higher grades than those who didn't. Thus, the strategies in this study are recognized as an essential and scientific guidance in Continuation writing and can be applied to practice repeatedly, to help solve the students' urgent problems in the tests and their long-term language achievement to a great extent.

Understanding before writing and grasping the overall situation

The written paragraphs employing Continuation Method are based on the understanding of the preceding text. To ensure that students' understanding will not deviate and get an overall control of the entire article, the following relevant information can be extracted from the given paragraphs.

- 1) the setting of the story, that is, when and where did the story take place?

- 2) the plot of the story, that is, who did what? What is the problem to be solved, namely, what is the conflict?
- 3) the theme of the story. To conceive the plot better, the theme must be depicted with a positive spirit and deep meaning.
- 4) the style of the preceding text to ensure the written part consistent with the style of the previous text.

Take the article in Appendix I as an example, things can be extracted as follows:

Setting: **When:** a day before the new year party **Where:** on the way...

Plot: **Who:** the rich couple, the old porter, another porter

What: The rich couple didn't get their delivery for their new year party, so they thought the old porter must occupy it and wanted to report to the police.

Theme: don't look down upon the poor people who can keep their promise. (respect)

The key points in writing

The Continuation Writing of the last two paragraphs of text must be based on the key words of the given sentence at the beginning of each continued paragraph, and a good connection of preceding and the following can promote the development of the plot smoothly.

To help students master it easily, each paragraph can be divided into two key points, altogether four key points for the two continued paragraphs. In the first paragraph, according to the keywords of the given sentence and the keywords of the second given sentence, two key points can be drawn to promote the development of the plot; In the second paragraph, according to the keywords of the given sentence of the second paragraph, the third and fourth key points can be drawn to present the main theme of the whole article.

The first two points are used to promote the development of the plot, while the last two points are used to solve the problem or achieve the climax of the story, and state the theme, or sublimate the theme when necessary. This idea above can be referred to as "three connections and one theme".

Take the article in Appendix I as an example, four key points can be as follows:

Paragraph 1: ∪
The angry wife asked him , 'Where is that old thief? This is our stuff.'

key point 1: another porter's explanation of things happening to the old porter (something serious) ∪
key point 2: Another porter's explanation of why he himself was carrying the stuff ∪

Paragraph 2: ∪
Upon hearing this, her husband had tears in his eyes and turned to his wife.

key point 3: husband's being touched and reasoning with or educating his wife ∪
key point 4: state the theme: wife's awaking (respect others or respect poor people or things like that.) ∪

From the paragraphs given, compliant and abusing are always from the word “wife”, so in key point 4, her awaking is preferable. The theme of the article should possess a positive spirit and deep meaning, therefore, anything negative or statement without a theme is not welcome and shouldn't be included, especially in a formal examination.

The four key points, regardless of the words of each paragraph, as 150 words in the requirement is just a total number of words for a whole continuation writing, combining the paragraphs given, should form a highly united article with perfect consistency.

Below is a suggested answer to the continuation writing exercise in appendix 1.

The angry wife asked him, “Where is that old thief? This is our stuff.” The porter replied, “Madam, please calm down. That poor old man was sick since last month. He wasn't able to earn enough to even have a single meal of the day. He was on the way to deliver your stuff, but he, who was hungry and sick, couldn't gather the strength to go any further in this heat of the noon. He fell down and he handed me \$15. His last words were, “I had taken an advance for this delivery, you take this and please deliver it to this address.” ♪

Upon hearing this, the husband had tears in his eyes and turned to his wife. “He was hungry, he was poor, but he was an honest man,” the husband said. The wife felt quite ashamed that she was angry with her husband's decision. She had no courage to look her husband in the eyes. Suddenly it dawned on her that honesty has no class. Respect everyone regardless of their financial and social status. It's always a good deed to give the one who deserves. ♪

Accumulation of advanced vocabularies and special sentence patterns

Advanced English words can make the language more colorful than the ordinary vocabulary. For example, the common word “about”, if changed into “concerning” is more advanced. Furthermore, it is better to use phrases “with regard to,” In the construction of a sentence pattern, three clauses (attributive clause, noun clauses,) and adverbial clauses), nonfinite verbs, emphasis sentence, preparatory subject “it”, preparatory object” it”, inverted sentences and subjunctive mood, etc. can be used for the preparation of a beautiful article. The diversity of sentence patterns will bring the best experience with high marks to students.

A beautiful and clear written paper

According to an interview among the expert raters in marking experiences of college entrance examination, almost 80% choose to give a relative 3 to 5 points lower grade to the compositions owning the same content word by word but with a sloppy and scrawls handwriting (the total score is 25 points). The only reason is that they can't see the paper clearly and suffer great trouble in marking; while the rest 20% put it that a terrible handwriting is the hint of a bad habit and sometimes with unclear rational thinking.

Handwriting can mirror the writer. Beautiful handwriting and a neat paper reflects a person's clear thinking, and can create a deep impression in the reader's mind. Although a good article is a synthesis of various factors, including logic thinking, good ideas, various sentence structures and a neat paper, but neatness is a great extra additional point to students' language achievement. Therefore, do cultivate habits timely to practice good handwriting. In the test, smearing, scribbling,

and modifying around on the paper are the taboos that students who desire for a good grade should pay urgent attention to.

Accumulation of topic sentences and sublimation sentences

The setting of Continuation Writing attaches much importance to the positive theme and spirit. The exploration of this kind of theme and spirit is appealing and crucial for a prepared mind. While a deviation of the theme may cause disastrous consequences for the whole Continuation Writing.

According to the formal test papers for College Entrance Examination of Zhejiang province and relative materials on this question type in recent years, the theme involved can be divided into the following aspects.

- 1) expressing gratitude: for example, "lose one's way, thank others for help";
- 2) transmitting different kinds of love: such as "mutual help", "selflessness of kinship", "power of friendship", "greatness of love"
- 3) Encouraging honesty and trustworthiness: such as "keeping the appointment," "keeping promises", "no cheating on the young and the old"
- 4) Advocating environmental protection: such as "garbage collection by the sea," "garbage into art"
- 5) caring for animals: such as "animal rescue people", "animal rescued"
- 6) Cultivating excellent moral characters: such as "perseverance in front of difficulties, overcoming difficulties, and promoting the solution to problems..."

The sample mentioned above is just the catalyst for further studies. With the exercise materials coming out endlessly, there will be more new themes. Still, when accumulated to a certain extent, the themes will automatically occur to students while reading any English article. The accumulation of the themes must be presented in sentences, and it is best to be accompanied by advanced structures. In addition, based on the themes, learning to apply the sublimation sentences will definitely make the composition reach higher levels.

RESULTS

To test the practicability of the above strategies scientifically, 56 participants were trained first to use them in practice for 10 pieces of different Continuation Writing exercises. They were then told to finish the questionnaire in appendix II for the second time, which were then used to compare with the participants' former answers in this same questionnaire before the training. And the following are the results after comparison.

According to the statics by rounding method based on the questionnaire in appendix II, students' interest in English and attitudes towards continuation writing change after applying the strategies above (compare table 1 with table 2)

Table 1 Students' Situation in Continuation Writing Before the training

	Question 1)	Question 2)	Question 3)	Question 4)	Question 5)
Content Answers	interest in English	Participation in English activities	Interest in English writing	Necessity of continuation writing	Difficulty of continuation writing
A.Yes	33%	20%	23%	30%	75%
B.No	40%	55%	63%	60%	8%
C.It depends	27%	25%	14%	10%	17%

Table 2 Students' Situation in Continuation Writing After the training

	Question 1)	Question 2)	Question 3)	Question 4)	Question 5)
Answers Content	interest in English	Participation in English activities	Interest in English writing	Necessity of continuation writing	Difficulty of continuation writing
A.Yes	65%	76%	68%	78%	20%
B.No	24%	13%	30%	12%	65%
C.It depends	11%	11%	2%	10%	15%

By comparison, after the training, students interest in English improved from 33percent to 65percent; students' participation in English activities raised from 20percent to 76percent; their interest in English writing became positive. Sixty-eight percent of the 56 participants showed interest in Continuation Writing; 78percent of the students considered it necessary to have Continuation Writing in the test paper, compared with 30percent before the training, and only 20percent of the students considered it difficult to have a Continuation Writing, with 15percent of them saying it depends on the difficulty of given passages and story's plots.

Students' response to the skills of Continuation Citing also changes (see table 3)

Table 3 Comparison of answers on skills of Continuation Writing

Question 2	How to improve the skills of continuation writing?
Before the training	40%: have no idea; 44%: answers cover all or one or two of the factors of theme, plot, language expression, and neatness of handwriting 16%: blank with no answer

After the training	<p>85%: answers cover all of the factors of theme, plot (key points), language expression, and neatness of handwriting</p> <p>10%: answers cover several but not all the factors of theme, plot (key points), language expression, and neatness of handwriting, including some other answers like the feelings, actions of the characters, etc.</p> <p>5%: blank with no answer</p>
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From the last free-response question above, 85percent of the participants knew how to improve the skills of Continuation Writing by mastering the theme of the text, catching the four key points to plot a story, polishing the language expressions and present a good and neat handwriting, as compared to 56percent ho don't give practical answers before the training, with 40 percent had no idea and 16percent hand in a blank one. However, 5percentof the students gave no answers, who belonged to the lazy or sleepy students during the lessons given.

CONCLUSION

Continuation Writing possessing the basis of theories, has proved to be beneficial for students' language achievement. And the strategies of Continuation Writing proposed in this study also proved to be practical in improving students' interest in English and English writing to 65percent and 68percent respectively, that is 32percent and 45percent higher than before. Meanwhile 50percent more students are willing to participate in the English activities, and 55percent more students think it easy to do Continuation Writing. Besides, over 80percent of the students also know how to improve their skills in this kind of exercise.

By using the strategies, students can not only get improved in the test scores but also in language acquisition. Furthermore, studies on this same topic can spring up to develop it in depth, which in turn can promote English language teaching.

The limitation of this study

Although the strategies proved to be practical in improving students' interest and participation in language study, there are still two limitations that need to be covered in the future deep study. First, although the participants can represent the average English level students, the number is limited to only one class, which can't represent all students from different places. Thus the result can not necessarily apply to other students. Second, although the strategies on Continuation Writing have proved to be practical to the participants, there can be some other helpful strategies to be found through further researches and exploration.

Suggestion for further study

The strategies of Continuation Writing never come automatically. Without reading more, thinking more, practicing more, and accumulating more, nothing can be achieved. Teachers can guide students to explore often, think frequently, and exercise regularly. They should drive students to broaden their horizon, and ask students to maintain a large storage of knowledge, to transform this new challenge into an extraordinary opportunity. Only in this way can the students grasp the writing methods and make a breakthrough in English language achievement. More practice and

exploration should be involved for further studies on this topic, and more participants should be covered.

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Appendix I

Read the text below to write two more paragraphs with their first sentences being given to make a complete story. (about 150 words)

There was a rich couple who was throwing a big new year party at their house. So they went shopping at the market where everything was of high cost and fixed price. They wanted to maintain their high living standard so they didn't mind paying a lot for it. After purchasing everything they needed, they called a porter to carry everything and drop it off at their home. The porter who came was of an old age, not very healthy looking. His clothes were torn and he looked as if he wasn't even able to meet his daily needs.

They asked the porter about the charges for delivering their goods at their home. The old porter quoted just a \$20, a price well below the market rate for delivering goods at couple's home in his cart. Yet, the couple argued and bargained with the porter and finally settled for \$15. The porter was struggling to make money for every single meal so he needed anything he could earn.

The couple was very happy thinking how well they bargained with the poor porter and paid him \$15 in advance and left after giving the porter their address for delivery. They reached their home and one hour passed, two hours passed, but the porter still hadn't delivered their stuff.

The wife started to get angry at her husband, "I always tell you not to trust such person but you never listen to me. Such a person is not even able to earn to feed himself for one time in a day, and you handed him everything we purchased for our big party. I am sure instead of delivering at our home, he must have disappeared with everything. We must immediately go back to the market to inquire and then to the police station to file the complaint against him."

They both left towards the market. On their way, near the market, they saw another porter. They stopped him to inquire about the old porter and noticed that he was carrying their stuff in his cart!

Paragraph 1 :

The angry wife asked him, "Where is that old thief? This is our stuff."

Paragraph 2:

Upon hearing this, her husband had tears in his eyes and turned to his wife.

Appendix II***Questionnaire on Students' Situation in Continuation Writing***

1. Read the following 5 questions, and choose one answer among A, B and C according to your own situation.

A. Yes	B. No	C. It depends
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- 1) Are you interested in English?
- 2) Do you often participate in English activities?
- 3) Do you like English writing part in the test?
- 4) Do you think it necessary to set continuation writing in the test?
- 5) Is it difficult to do continuation writing?

2. How to improve the skills of continuation writing?
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