

The Application of the Process-Writing Approach to English Writing Teaching

Sijia Wang

China West Normal University, Nanchong 637000, China

Abstract

This paper explores the application of the Process-Writing approach in English writing teaching. It first introduces three writing approaches: the Product Approach, which emphasizes the final written product; the Process Approach, focusing on the stages of writing; and the Genre Approach, highlighting text types and conventions. The paper then provides a detailed introduction to the Process-Writing Approach, which centers on iterative drafting, revising, and editing. It further discusses the practical implementation of this approach in the classroom, aiming to enhance learners' writing ability through guided practice and feedback.

Keywords

Process-Writing Approach; English Writing Teaching; Writing Ability.

1. Introduction

The English Curriculum Standard ((2017 Edition, 2020 Revision)) underscores that English writing proficiency reflects learners' expressive competence, cognitive abilities, communicative skills, and overall language proficiency. Nevertheless, students' English writing performance has remained a persistent challenge. In the domain of English writing instruction, diverse pedagogical approaches have been adopted to enhance learners' writing competence. Among these, the Product Approach, the Process Approach, and the Genre Approach have received considerable scholarly attention.

The Product Approach, which prioritizes the final written output, places emphasis on linguistic accuracy, including the appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax, and cohesive devices. This method typically involves structured imitation exercises in which learners replicate model texts. However, a notable limitation of this approach is its tendency to overlook the writing process itself, as well as learners' pre-existing skills. While it seeks to familiarize learners with the communicative functions and discourse structures of different genres, critics argue that it may stifle creativity and inadequately address the development of writing strategies. In contrast, the Process Approach conceptualizes writing as a recursive and dynamic activity. It highlights the significance of multiple drafting stages, iterative revisions, and collaborative interactions between teachers and learners.

2. Introduction to Relevant Writing Approach

2.1. The Product Approach

The Product Approach prioritizes the final written output, operating on the premise that writing proficiency is contingent upon linguistic competence, particularly in the accurate application of vocabulary, syntax, and cohesive devices [1]. Rooted in behaviorist theory, this approach conceptualizes language acquisition as a linear process of stimulus, response, and reinforcement.

In pedagogical practice, the Product Approach follows a structured sequence:

- (1) Model Analysis: Teachers introduce an exemplar text, systematically deconstructing its rhetorical organization, discourse features, and linguistic patterns to familiarize learners with genre-specific conventions.
- (2) Controlled Practice: Learners engage in targeted exercises, mastering formulaic sentence structures pertinent to specific text types under instructor guidance.
- (3) Guided Imitation: Students produce compositions by emulating model texts, which instructors then evaluate and grade based on prescribed linguistic and structural criteria.
- (4) Free Production: Learners apply acquired skills in autonomous writing tasks (e.g., essays, narratives, correspondence), theoretically achieving fluency through iterative practice.

2.2. The Genre Approach

The Genre Approach is grounded in the fundamental principle that language functions as a means of social communication, necessitating adherence to genre-specific conventions to achieve communicative goals. This approach operates with three primary pedagogical objectives: (1) to develop learners' metacognitive awareness of genre-specific communicative purposes and their corresponding textual organizations; (2) to facilitate learners' understanding of discourse as both a linguistic and sociocultural construct; and (3) to equip learners with schematic knowledge of textual structures while developing their procedural competence in genre analysis and production[2].

Feedback under this paradigm treats student compositions as terminal artifacts, with assessment prioritizing formal accuracy (grammar, lexicon, cohesion) over creative or process-oriented development.

2.3. The Process Approach

The process approach views writing as a process, rather than merely focusing on the final written product. It reflects the notion that language learning is a complex activity involving psychological cognition and linguistic communication. Consequently, the teaching steps emphasize the multiple drafts and revisions, and stress the importance of teacher-learner interaction during the review phase. The process approach has attracted numerous researchers, yet researchers have not reached a consensus on the description of the writing process.

3. Features of the Process Approach

Nevertheless, the fundamental principles of the process approach are shared: it focuses on all writing activities, such as planning, gathering materials, composing, revising, and finalizing the draft [3]. Instead of placing emphasis on linguistic knowledge such as grammar and text structure, the process approach focuses on the writing process and skills, including planning, sourcing materials, drafting, and reviewing.

- (1) It focuses on the specific writing process and the mining and presentation of the writing content. The Process Approach distinctively emphasizes the specific writing process through its staged pedagogical framework, and the mining and presentation of writing content via systematic cognitive scaffolding. For instance, it points out the process: mandates multiple drafts with interim peer reviews (e.g., using checklists for structural/organizational feedback). Besides, Content development, employs heuristic techniques like brainstorming matrices to excavate ideas, followed by iterative refinement through teacher-student writing conferences.
- (2) This approach fundamentally takes writing as a socially situated communicative practice, emphasizing its authentic purposes. Rather than producing texts merely for teacher evaluation, students engage in writing as a meaning-making process aimed at genuine reader engagement.
- (3) This approach adopts a student-centered pedagogy, emphasizing sustained interaction between teacher-student and peer work throughout the writing process. By fostering a low-

anxiety collaborative environment, it enables learners to exercise learner autonomy through self-directed writing practices maximize their role in meaning construction and engage in reciprocal scaffolding during co-construction activities.

(4)The role of teachers has undergone a fundamental shift, transitioning from traditional figures-sole knowledge transmitters and evaluators to multifaceted facilitators who serve as organizers, scaffolding providers, responsive readers, and resource consultants. These roles requires teachers to tailored guidance aligned with each phase of the writing process, identify and address emerging compositional challenges through formative feedback and foster learner autonomy while maintaining supportive structures.

(5)It conceptualizes composition as a cyclical and meaning-constructing process, including planning, drafting, and revision - operate in a non-linear, iterative manner. This cyclical nature of writing allows for continuous refinement of both content and form through repeated engagement with the text.

(6)This approach emphasizes the critical role of formative assessment, incorporating multi-source feedback that encompass: instructor-provided commentary, peer-generated evaluative input, and writer-initiated self-reflection. The evaluation framework operates through a tripartite structure involving pedagogical assessment (teacher),collaborative review (peers), and metacognitive monitoring (learner-as-assessor).

(7) It emphasizes multiple revisions and considers revisions a vital part. It conceptualizes composition as a cyclical process, which needs constant revision.

4. Stages of the Process-Writing Approach

Scholars hold divergent views on the specific delineation of the writing process, though they generally divide process writing into several stages: pre-writing, drafting, feedback, revision, and editing. This paper draws upon the writing instruction principles outlined in the New Curriculum Standards and, in light of practical teaching considerations, categorizes the process writing approach into three key phases: (1) the pre-writing stage, (2) the writing stage, and (3) the post-writing stage. Each phase encompasses specific instructional components.

4.1. The Pre-Writing Stage

This stage requires instructors to design various warm-up activities tailored to the writing theme, aiming at: sourcing writing materials, consolidating pre-writing ideas, and generating structured outlines based on activity outcomes. Common pre-writing techniques include:

(1)Brainstorming

The instructor encourages students to freely associate ideas related to the writing topic without censorship or immediate critique. This technique produces abundant raw material within short time frames, significantly enhancing student engagement and classroom dynamism and diversity of writing.

(2)Small-Group Discussion (4-6 students/group)

The teacher organizes students into small groups of 4 to 6 members each. During the discussion, each participant actively contributes ideas based on their individual understanding of the topic. Through this collaborative exchange, the group synthesizes diverse perspectives, fostering collective creativity (brainstorming effect) and broadening critical thinking skills. This structured interaction not only deepens topic comprehension but also cultivates essential collaborative learning competencies.

(3) 5W1H Questioning Technique

The 5W1H method-derived from the six key question words: What, Who, Why, How, Where, and When-serves as a systematic framework for idea development. By continuously examining

a topic through these interrogative lenses, writers can expand Perspectives which means to break down complex subjects into manageable components. Then, Identify and refine nuanced aspects of their writing. Besides, stimulate creativity which means to discover new angles and connections through structured inquiry. This technique proves particularly effective during pre-writing stages, where it helps generate comprehensive content outlines, overcome "blank page syndrome" by providing concrete starting points and ensure well-developed arguments through multi-dimensional analysis.

4.2. The Writing Stage

At this stage, students engage in independent writing. To enhance language fluency, teachers may provide common transitional words or phrases such as: what's more, in addition, besides, however, etc. The teacher guides students to construct mind maps based on the outcomes of the preparatory phase. For students with weaker foundations, core vocabulary and commonly used expressions can be provided to assist them. During this stage, teachers should primarily focus on whether students have covered all key points and whether the content is substantial, without paying excessive attention to language errors. Its key features includes: maintain original sentence structures and meaning; preserve all technical terms (mind maps, core vocabulary, etc.); keep the enumeration of transitional words intact; retain the instructional focus points exactly as stated; use simple, clear academic language without added explanations.

4.3. The Post-Writing Stage

Wang [4] argues that writing competence is better reflected in the ability to revise, evaluate, and summarize finished works rather than merely completing a single composition. Zhang [5]proposes that text revision "can cultivate students' sense of readership and enhance their anticipation of readers' expectations." "In traditional high school writing instruction, teachers assign grades based on the five-tier evaluation criteria of the National College Entrance Examination. Students receive writing feedback that is general and vague, making it difficult for them to effectively identify their problems, consequently failing to improve their writing skills. The process writing approach places significant emphasis on post-draft revision, which includes revising, rewriting, and proofreading.

(1)The self-revision

The self-revision process in process writing emphasizes that students are the main agents and should take responsibility for their own writing by identifying errors themselves. The teacher is no longer the sole authority; instead, students evaluate their own work. By providing revision criteria, students are guided to revise their own compositions, identify problems, and reflect on and resolve these issues.

(2)Peer Review

Due to fixed thinking patterns, students often struggle to identify problems and errors in their own writing. Therefore, peer correction is conducted within small groups to provide mutual assistance. After completing the first draft, the teacher posts revision criteria, allowing students to engage in thorough group discussions and mutual revisions, which may include adding comments. This process enables students to reflect on the flaws and issues in their own writing, helping them avoid repeating similar mistakes. Additionally, peer evaluation fosters collaborative learning habits among students.

(3)Teacher Feedback

After collecting student compositions, teachers should allocate time to review them, assign grades, and provide appropriate comments. This helps students identify their existing problems and learn to "categorize" their writing. Feedback should highlight students' "strengths," such as excellent sentence structures, and offer ample encouragement. Through such timely feedback, teachers can effectively boost students' confidence in English learning.

(4) Final Editing and Polishing

At this stage, students conduct final checks and revisions of their compositions based on previous error corrections and teacher feedback. Teachers may select common error types for unified explanation to help students deepen their understanding. Additionally, exemplary student works can be displayed via multimedia for peer learning, or outstanding sentences from each student's writing can be compiled as reference materials.

It should be noted that the stages of process writing are not strictly linear or fixed; in practice, they often involve cyclical repetition and mutual integration. Students may revisit and improve previously unsatisfactory sections.

5. Suggestions for Writing Teaching based on Process-Writing Approach

5.1. Preparation Stage

Firstly, teachers should emphasize pre-writing preparation by carefully designing activities and arranging classroom formats in advance. Multimedia tools such as images and videos can be used to provide comprehensive language input centered around the writing topic, enabling students to activate their background knowledge. Subsequently, brainstorming, group discussions, and mind maps can be employed to outline compositions, helping students develop their organizational skills. Additionally, to support students with weaker foundations, teachers should promptly supplement relevant cohesive devices and useful sentence patterns to aid expression.

Secondly, both inside and outside the classroom, teachers should focus on accumulating English materials to enrich students' language corpus. Relying solely on textbook input is insufficient; additional resources such as videos, audio, and extracurricular readings should be incorporated to enhance language exposure.

Thirdly, teachers should note that group discussions require certain comprehensive abilities from students. Many introverted students may be reluctant to participate, while higher-achieving students may dominate discussions. Therefore, during group discussions, teachers should circulate the classroom to monitor each group's progress.

Finally, teachers are not only organizers and participants but also reflective practitioners and adapters. They should maintain records for each writing lesson and engage in timely reflection. After class, teaching journals should be written to evaluate the overall implementation of the lesson.

5.2. While-Writing Stage

First, students' first drafts are typically rough. Due to habitual thinking patterns, they often make numerous grammatical and tense errors that they cannot identify themselves.

Second, students' compositions may also suffer from incomplete key points and unnatural transitions. Teachers should address this by providing checklists on the board or through multimedia for reference. For information points students have already covered, teachers can make annotation marks, which helps remind and encourage students to carefully analyze requirements and ensure all key points are addressed in their writing.

Third, peer review is an ongoing process of adjustment and refinement. In the initial stages of action research, expectations should not be set too high, as students primarily identify basic grammatical errors, check for well-constructed sentences, and verify whether all required information points are included—issues that are relatively easy to spot. Many students still lack the ability to evaluate content structure and lexical choices, areas that require continuous reinforcement. As students become more proficient in completing tasks, their logical thinking and language usage skills show significant improvement.

5.3. Post-Writing Stage

Firstly, once students have finished their third drafts, teachers should take an active role in praising those who have produced exceptional compositions, and showcasing these model essays for the class. This not only instills a sense of engagement and accomplishment in students but also reinforces their understanding and appreciation of the process writing method, thereby heightening their enthusiasm for writing. Secondly, upon the completion of writing assignments, teachers should conduct a thorough analysis and review of high-quality sample essays. This should involve highlighting effective sentence structures, unique expressions, and innovative organizational patterns employed in these essays. Moreover, common errors made by students should be collectively addressed and reviewed, ensuring that students are mindful of these pitfalls and learn from them. Thirdly, teachers must maintain timely and up-to-date teaching reflection journals. These records should encompass a detailed account of: the instructional strategies employed and their effectiveness. Student participation and performance in the classroom. The successful completion of assigned tasks and the management of unforeseen classroom situations.

6. Conclusion

This paper has systematically examined the application of the Process-Writing Approach in English writing instruction, highlighting its pedagogical significance and practical implementation. The Process Approach reconceptualizes writing as a recursive, meaning-making activity that engages learners in planning, drafting, revising, and editing through iterative cycles. The approach breaks writing into stages—pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing—it fosters metacognitive awareness and skill development. Techniques like brainstorming and peer review scaffold idea generation and organization.

In conclusion, the Process-Writing Approach empowers learners to engage deeply with writing as both a cognitive and social practice, bridging the gap between linguistic competence and communicative competence. It offers an alternative to traditional product-focused approach, ultimately fostering more confident and proficient language learners.

References

- [1] PicasA. Teaching English Writing [M]. London: Macmillan, 1982.
- [2] Han Jinlong, & Qin Xiubai. (2000). Genre analysis and the genre-based teaching approach. *Foreign Language World*, (1), 11-18.
- [3] Han Jinlong. (2001). English writing teaching: The process-genre approach. *Foreign Language World*, (4), 35-40.
- [4] Wang Jinghua. (2015). The application of the process writing approach in junior high school English teaching [Master's thesis, Liaoning Normal University]. Dalian, China.
- [5] Zhang Rongjian. (1994). From the "process writing approach" to the "environmental writing approach." *Journal of Shandong Foreign Languages Teaching*, (4).