

# New NMET Task: Continuation Task in China

Qinyu Wei \*

Institute of Education, University of Reading, Reading, RG6 6EE, United Kingdom

\* Corresponding Author Email: pishunflame@hhu.edu.cn

**Abstract.** After a reform of the National Matriculation Entrance Test (NMET), Continuation Task, as a new writing task, has aroused extensive attention from educators and experts. In this instance, there is an urgent need to deal with several problems regarding how to enhance students' ability in continuation task, and how to improve teaching effects after the reform. Based on relevant research, this paper summarizes and analyzes the theoretical background and research status of Continuation Task. Moreover, it also analyzes the current teaching process of continuation task, the promoting effect of continuation task and the factors that affect the promoting effect and finds that the current Continuation Task teaching status is not encouraging in that there are insufficient teaching resources for English writing classes, and teachers find it challenging to assist students with varying English proficiency levels. Therefore, proper reading materials and specific strategies are required in Continuation Task teaching. After that, it points out the deficiency of some research and areas that need to be improved, so as to provide suggestions for continuation task teaching, thus effectively improving students' learning effect.

**Keywords:** Continuation Task; the promoting effect; NMET.

## 1. Introduction

Writing has always been regarded as an important comprehensive skill, which has high requirements for learners' ability. English writing is an important part of English learning and in the English Curriculum Standards for General Senior High Schools (2017 Edition) [1]. It not only stipulates that students' sense of discourse is supposed to be developed as well as their writing ability should be enhanced, but also emphasizes that in English writing. Students should be able to understand, interpret and judge the context and meaning of discourse, then express their personal opinions and feelings, and finally attach equal importance to reading and writing. However, the situation is not optimistic when it comes to the current situation of English teaching in senior high schools. Many teachers teach reading by using Grammar Translation Teaching and teach writing by demanding students recite model essays regularly. In class, reading and writing are taught separately, and so are language input and output. In traditional classes, teachers are active lecturers and students are accustomed to taking in whatever their teachers teach them. As a result, English writing teaching requires students to recite excellent model essays or memorize writing templates to prepare for exams, but not to teach students English writing skills, which leads to students paying less attention to writing and losing interest gradually, and finally negatively affects the improvement of students' English comprehensive ability, and meanwhile, traditional teaching methods are not conducive to cultivating students' divergent thinking to some extent. Furthermore, in school, students usually have enough reading training but seldom have a writing practice, and some schools even have no writing classes. Therefore, in view of the present situation of English writing in senior high schools, it is necessary to optimize the teaching methods in order to improve the writing ability of senior high school students. In domestic research, many methods have been put forward from theory and practice. Among them, "Continuation Task", proposed by Professor Wang Chuming, as a new English teaching mode with Chinese characteristics, has attracted much attention from many researchers [2]. Continuation Task, combining reading with writing, involves language input and output. It requires students to read an article with no ending before they start writing. Then, according to what they read, they need to use their imagination to produce an appropriate ending, accordingly, their English writing ability will be improved.

With the further teaching reform, in 2016, Zhejiang Province first adopted Continuation Task in the New College Entrance Examination, which had a significant positive effect on writing teaching. With the popularization of this type of writing, Continuation Task gradually appeared in the New College Entrance Examination in Zhejiang, Guangdong, Jiangsu and other provinces. In the examination, students need to read an article without an ending of less than 350 words, and then they need to continue writing about 150 words according to the reading material, the opening words of the given paragraph and the marked keywords, so as to develop it into an article that is logically connected with the given material. The full score of the writing task is 25 points, accounting for 1/6 of a total score of 100 points for the whole paper.

From this, it can be drawn that Continuation Task tests students' reading and writing abilities at the same time, giving students more room to develop their imagination and writing ability. With the increasing popularity of Continuation Task, senior high school teachers and students begin to pay attention to it. However, the current teaching situation of Continuation Task is not optimistic, for example, it is difficult for teachers to guide students with different English levels and teaching materials for English writing are not enough in language teaching. Therefore, more research about Continuation Task is warranted and it is necessary to explore and utilize some teaching methods for Continuation Task, so as to improve the teaching effect.

Based on reviewing domestic scholars' research on Continuation Task, this paper introduces the theoretical basis of Continuation Task. Furthermore, it analyzes the current teaching process of this writing task, the promoting effect of continuation task and the factors that affect the promoting effect, trying to provide senior high school teachers with specific teaching strategies and valuable reference of teaching design, in order to improve students' learning effect and their writing ability.

## **2. The Definition of Continuation Task**

Based on the input and output hypothesis, Wang put forward a way to combine reading and writing for training, which was referred to Continuation Task, also known as the "Dream of Red Mansions" method [3]. Since this work was completed by two writers, and the related model used was the reading-to-write model. On the basis of fully understanding the given reading materials, learners combine reading with writing, imitate the language style of the original, creatively continue writing, and finally make the original text an excellent logical article. This method combines input and output, thus improving the efficiency of foreign language learning [2, 3].

## **3. Theoretical Basis**

### **3.1. Input Hypothesis**

Krashen's Input Hypothesis is one of the most influential theories in second language acquisition [4]. In this theory, Krashen believes that comprehensive input is the only way to learn a second language. Only when the content of language input is slightly more difficult than the language that students have mastered can students' language ability be improved. It can be explained by the famous "i+1" formula, in which "i" represents the current level of learners, "1" represents language materials whose level is slightly higher than the current level of learners, and "i+1" represents the language level of the next stage. The effective input will only happen if the difficulty of the reading materials that students are exposed to is slightly higher than their cognitive level.

Therefore, according to the formula, when the difficulty of the reading material chosen by the teacher is slightly higher than the cognitive level of the students, the learners will gain enough comprehensible input by studying relevant knowledge based on their previous learning experience, and finally acquire the language. Therefore, teachers should select appropriate reading materials so as to help students understand the original and finally make the original text an excellent logical article.

### 3.2. Output Hypothesis

The output hypothesis was put forward by Swain, which emphasized the importance of comprehensible output in cultivating language competence [5]. In the study, Swain found that although learners had enough language input, they could not reach the target level when speaking and writing English. Swain believed that learners often lacked opportunities for language output, which led to this situation, and the learners' learning results could not be tested.

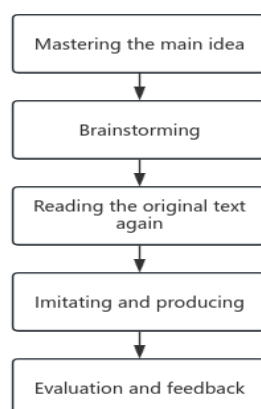
According to Swain, output hypothesis includes three functions, namely, the noticing function, the hypothesis testing function and metalinguistic reflective function [6]. The noticing function means that learners are aware of the gap between their own language structure and the language they need to express, thus triggering the cognitive process of language learning, so as to solidify prior knowledge and acquire new language knowledge. The hypothesis testing function means that the process of second language acquisition is a process of continuous hypothesis testing, during which learners constantly use the target language to check whether their expression is right, thus improving their accuracy of using the language. Metalinguistic reflective function means that learners use prior knowledge to understand and reflect the language they express, and then deepen their understanding on language form and meaning, making it easier to comprehend.

## 4. Research on the Continuation Task

Compared with domestic literature, there is less foreign literature about Continuation Task, but foreign researchers have done much research on the effect of reading on writing. In recent years, more and more research on Continuation Task appeared in China, which mainly focused on the following three aspects: the current teaching process of continuation task, the promoting effect of continuation task and the factors that affect the promoting effect.

### 4.1. Teaching Process of Continuation Task

In the teaching process, different scholars try to apply various strategies in continuation writing task. For example, Lin et al. emphasizes the importance of language input in continuation writing task, and requires senior high school students to stick to the principle of sufficient quantity and make progress step by step in the reading process, and accordingly put forward several teaching steps [7]. This paper summarizes them and the steps can be seen in Figure 1 below.

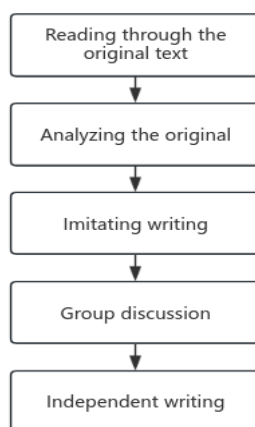


**Fig 1.** Teaching steps (Photo credit: Original).

As shown in Figure 1, it includes the following steps: first, students grasp the main idea and storyline after reading through the article, then under the guidance of teachers, students brainstorm about the story, actively communicate with their peers, imagine what may happen later, after that, they read the original text again to understand the linguistic features of the article, subsequently, they continue to write the story logically, and at last students conduct self-assessment and peer revision is also required. Through these steps, students can gradually comprehend the text deeply and lay a good foundation for further writing.

Similarly, other scholars also emphasize the importance of gradual language input. In order to improve the efficiency of English writing teaching, Yang suggested to utilize the process genre approach which includes four steps: analysis of the model essay, imitating writing, independent writing, and edition and revision [8]. It emphasizes that teachers should provide students with necessary situational knowledge, so that students can understand the generic structure and language characteristics of the article. After fully grasping the content and writing purpose of the article, they can try to complete the continuation writing task and finally give feedback from peers and teachers. Therefore, it forms a relatively complete process [9].

Yang designed the teaching process according to the current teaching situation in senior high schools, and applied the process genre approach to the continuation writing task and then got the teaching process which this paper summarized as follows [9].

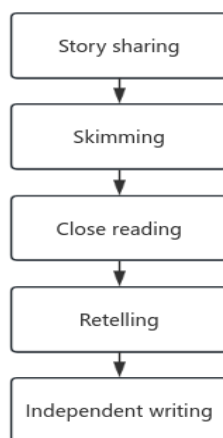


**Fig 2.** Teaching steps (Photo credit: Original).

Figure 2 shows that the process of writing after reading generally includes the following parts: First, students read through the article, and if it is a narrative, it is necessary to figure out how the story begins and develops, as well as the time and place where the story happens and the key characters who appear in the story. Teachers should guide students to grasp the key words and sentences that promote the development of the story, and then help them analyze the personality of the characters, so as to create situation to help them predict the development of the story. After sufficient analysis on the original, teachers would guide students to learn words and sentences from the original text and imitate writing. After that, students would discuss in groups and share their ideas, and then write independently. Finally, students would conduct self-evaluation and peer-evaluation, and lastly, teachers select the model essays and give feedback on the performance of students and point out the typical mistakes in the students' articles. In this thorough teaching process, students can make progress step by step, which promotes the interaction between teachers and students and students' in-depth understanding of the text, thus helping to improve the efficiency of writing teaching.

Some researchers put forward relevant teaching strategies from different theoretical perspectives. For example, Li and Xie put forward a student-oriented teaching method applied in continuation writing task from the perspective of metacognitive theory, which encourages students to conduct self-study and cooperation with peers and mind mapping is utilized to help students become clear about key events and master the whole structure of the original text, thus deepening their understanding of the story [10]. The general teaching process includes the following parts: first, the teacher selects the appropriate text, and then uses the mind mapping to help students understand and analyze the text. After the students know about the general story line, they are allowed to imagine what events will happen freely while the teacher pays attention to the students' writing progress in time to monitor whether the plots students create deviate from the theme. Finally, students are required to make self-evaluation and peer-evaluation according to the requirements of the writing task so as to avoid subjective judgment caused by teachers' single evaluation.

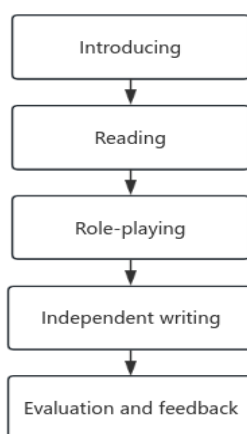
Similarly, Wang also applied mind mapping in the writing teaching, and divided the teaching process into several parts, this paper summarized them as the following parts, as shown in Figure 3 [11].



**Fig 3.** Teaching steps (Photo credit: Original).

As can be seen from Figure 3, the process of writing generally includes five parts. First, students share their own experiences which are relevant to the story, so as to stimulate students' interest and introduce the theme of the text. After that, students try to grasp the general idea of the article by skimming, and then they need to know about the details of the text by reading carefully. Subsequently, the teacher would use mind mapping to help students sort through the clues and master the story line of the whole article. Students would review the text and attempt to retell the story according to the mind maps, which deepens their understanding of the original, thus paving the way for the independent writing. It can be seen that the application of mind mapping in teaching can lay a good foundation for the subsequent writing.

Yang combined multimodal discourse theory and proposed that pictures, videos and body language should be added in teaching to help students acquire knowledge, which emphasized situational teaching and immersion instruction [12]. Similarly, Xu in the literature class also found that situated practice helped students deepen their understanding of what they had learned and then put forward several steps, this paper summarized them as the following procedures [13].



**Fig 4.** Teaching steps (Photo credit: Original).

As can be seen from Figure 4, the teaching process of writing task is divided into five parts. The first part is the introduction part. The teacher first introduces the writing background and the author information of the work, so that students can understand the relevant content. After that, the teacher asks some questions about the content of the work, thus guiding students to find key information and then encourages them to discuss the answers to the questions in groups. Subsequently, once students have a certain understanding and mastery of the text, the teacher would organize students to take part in a role-play. Through role-playing, students would deeply understand the content of the text, and

then the teacher deletes the ending of the original text and asks the students to complete the writing task independently. The last step is the evaluation and feedback. First, peer-assessment and self-assessment are carried out in the groups, and then the teacher would give feedback to students' writing.

To sum up, different scholars apply various strategies in the teaching activities of continuation task including: gradual input, the application of mind maps and situational teaching. But there are few studies to identify which strategy is most suitable for continuation task teaching. Moreover, according to the existing research, it can be seen that the teaching process of continuation task has about three stages: the information input stage, the information output stage and the evaluation and reflection stage. However, the specific and detailed steps need to be further studied, and there is no uniform regulation on the teaching steps of continuation task in China, so more research is needed to explore the specific steps in the future.

#### **4.2. The Promoting Effect of Continuation Task**

Many researchers have identified that continuation task significantly affects students' writing in several aspects, including vocabulary, syntactic structure and discourse coherence. Jiang and Tu found that continuation task effectively promoted the acquisition of English vocabulary in matters of the meaning and usage which was more efficient than summary writing [14]. Wang and Wang investigated the promoting effect of continuation task in terms of the syntactic structure and found that students used relative clauses frequently in their writing, indicating that continuation task could promote students' learning of relative clauses, and at the same time improving the accuracy of their language expression [15]. Jiang and Chen studied the aspect of discourse coherence and identified that the complexity and accuracy of students' writing had been improved a lot compared with topic composition [16].

Above all, scholars have analyzed the promoting effect of continuation task from different angles, and affirm the influence of "continuation task" on various aspects of English writing, indicating that writing after reading can help improve students' writing ability.

#### **4.3. Factors Affecting the Promoting Effect**

Gu and Zhou compared two teaching methods used in continuation task: one was to set up the instructive tasks for students at the intervals between reading and writing, and the other was to write essays directly after reading. The results showed that the instruction in the text-learner interaction promoted the effectiveness of students' learning, and they could master vocabulary better. This identified that when teachers purposefully guide students to complete continuation task, students' writing performance would be better [17].

In addition, some researchers have found that the content of reading has a certain influence on the the promoting effect. Zhang and Zhang found that the students' writing performance in continuation task was influenced by different genres of the original text. In the continuation tasks of argumentation, students made fewer language errors than the mistakes they made in narration writing [18]. While in the continuation tasks of narration, the students' articles were more fluent and had more words than those in the continuation tasks of argumentation [18]. Similarly, Chen also found that the reading materials in continuation tasks had a great influence on students' writing performance, and research showed that students' writing ability would be improved if the content of reading materials was slightly more challenging than students' current level [19].

To sum up, under the purposeful guidance of teachers, students' writing ability is more likely to be improved in writing teaching, and teachers should choose the appropriate reading materials to make this new writing task more acceptable to senior high school students.

### **5. Conclusion**

The reform of foreign language teaching in Chinese universities has made significant progress, but there are still certain areas that could be improved in English writing. "Continuation task", a new

English teaching mode with Chinese characteristics, aims to improve writing ability and emphasize the importance of language input and output, challenging the traditional writing mode and helping students improve their capacity for application towards English. In order to provide students with more efficient English writing classes, teachers should choose appropriate reading materials, apply certain strategies in writing teaching, and select optimal teaching designs to promote students' writing ability. This paper focuses on the research of teaching without examining the area concerning the influence of continuation task on students' feelings and cognition. Therefore, research about that area can be studied in the future.

## References

- [1] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (PRC). English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 Edition) [S]. Beijing: People's Education Press, 2018.
- [2] Wang Chuming. Continuation task-an effective way to improve the efficiency of foreign language learning. *Foreign Language World*, 2012, (05), 2-7.
- [3] Wang Chuming. Promoting Learning by "Continuation". *Modern Foreign Languages*, 2016, (06), 784-793+873.
- [4] Krashen, S. D. The input hypothesis: Issues and implications. Addison-Wesley Longman Limited, 1985.
- [5] Swain, M. Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. *Input in second language acquisition*, 1985, 15, 165-179.
- [6] Swain, M. Three functions of output in second language learning. *Principles and practice in applied linguistics: Studies in honor of HG Widdowson*, 1995, 125-144.
- [7] Lin, L., Min, X., & Qin, L. Study on Teaching Strategies of Continuation Task. *Frontiers in Educational Research*, 2021, 4(15).
- [8] Han Jinlong. Teaching of English Writing: Process Genre Approach. *Foreign Languages*, 2001, (4), 35-40.
- [9] Yang, T. Analysis on the Application of the Process Genre Approach in the Teaching of Continuation Task in Senior High School. *The Educational Review, USA*, 2023, 7(5), 585-589.
- [10] Li, Q., & Xie, M. Analysis of the Teaching Strategy of English Continuation Task in Senior High School from the Perspective of Metacognitive Theory. *International Linguistics Research*, 2022, 5(2), p16-p22.
- [11] Wang Xuepeng. Practice and enlightenment of continuation task for junior high school English teaching. *English Teachers*, 2016, (23), 108-111.
- [12] Yang, T. Analysis on the Application of Multimodal Teaching Mode to English Continuation Task Teaching in Senior High School. *Curriculum and Teaching Methodology*, 2022, 5(6), 45-50.
- [13] Xu Qiuhong. How to apply "continuation task" to promote the teaching of English and American literature —Taking the course "Selected Reading of English and American Short Stories" as an example. *English teachers*, 2016, (19), 19-24.
- [14] Jiang Lin&Tu Mengwei. A Study on the Effect of Continuation Task on Second Language Vocabulary Learning. *Modern Foreign Languages*, 2016, (06), 819-829+874.
- [15] Wang Qi & Wang Chuming.. Promoting Acquisition of English Relative Clauses by Continuation. *Foreign Language Learning Theory and Practice*, 2019, (03), 1-5+18.
- [16] Jiang Lin & Chen Jin. The influence of continuation task on the accuracy, complexity and fluency of English writing. *Modern Foreign Languages*, 2015, (03), 366-375+438.
- [17] Gu Jing & Zhou Yumei. The Influence of Instruction in the Text-learner Interaction on Alignment Effect in continuation task. *Journal of Xi'an International Studies University*, 2018, (04), 57-61.
- [18] Zhang Xiuqin & Zhang Qian. Research on the Influence of Continuation Tasks of Different Genres on Alignment. *Foreign Language World*, 2017, (03), 90-96.
- [19] Chen Liping. Model instruction in writing teaching from the perspective of the relationship between reading and writing. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, 2001, (04), 28-29+38.