

Strategies for Motivating Senior High School Students to Learn English Writing

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Abstract. English writing is gaining more attention in all stages of English teaching. However, teaching in Chinese senior high school is not satisfactory, and consequently, students are bored of learning. Hence, this study aims to explore what factors repress high school students from learning English writing. Motivation is the key to success in English learning. Therefore, inspiring students' learning motivation is of great importance in guiding English writing teaching. This study first discusses the meaning and types of motivation, analyzes the role of motivation in English writing learning, and proposes strategies in the background of the new curriculum standards based on modern educational theory. The findings suggested that making students understand the social value of English writing and helping them to set appropriate learning goals can lead them to have more impetus for English writing learning. Moreover, the findings reinforced the importance of task-based learning strategies to stimulate students' interest in learning. Also, using student feedback correctly to improve teachers' assessment strategies and carrying out extracurricular activities helps reinforce and supplement knowledge, enabling students to stay motivated to learn English writing.

Keywords: English Writing, Motivation, New Curriculum Standards.

1. Introduction

English writing is not only a compulsory part of the National College Entrance Examination, but also helps students to develop their overall language skills. As a core skill, writing has always been given great value in the field of Second Language Acquisition [1]. According to the requirements of the English curriculum grading objectives at the basic education level, New English Curriculum Standards for General High Schools (2017 edition, latest revision in 2020) emphasizes the cultivation of students' core competencies in English and the implementation of the fundamental task of establishing moral education, which puts forward new contents and standards to cultivate language skills, language knowledge, emotional attitude, learning strategies and cultural awareness. The four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing are still the mainstay of language skill development. Senior high school students can use English, consolidate language knowledge, and improve language skills through a large number of practical activities in English writing.

Improving high school students' English writing cannot be achieved without motivating them to learn. Motivation is an important motivational factor that influences students' self-regulation and persistence in the face of difficulties. It affects not only students' academic goal selection, effort and will control, but also their choice of learning strategies, which can ultimately affect their academic performance. Senior high school students are motivated individuals. They are social individuals whose motivation to learn English writing is inevitably influenced and constrained by their environment. Many scholars have delved into the importance of motivation for learning English. Motivation regulation was a very attractive new field in motivation psychology. In the school environment, an important aspect of motivation was to maintain learning goals and control other factors that reduce learning motivation [2]. When faced with negative emotional factors in language learning, learners who know how to limit motivation damage and take self-motivation measures would have a great advantage [3]. There is no doubt that to effectively improve language learning requires a deep probe into how students sustain and improve motivation.

However, high school English writing has always been a problem for English teachers. In particular, how teachers improve students' writing and motivate them to write in English is a long-

term challenge. As high school is the stage of transition from elementary to advanced English learning, writing is experienced from basic to advanced levels which requires a higher degree of cohesion, lexical resources and grammatical accuracy. It represents students' cognitive and affective ability, especially intellectual, reflective, and logical skills. For various reasons, such as test-taking concepts and writing teaching methods, many high school students are afraid of English writing [4]. Many students even reflect serious anxiety and fear in the usual writing learning process, which seriously affects their English writing performance. Some teachers still focus only on students' primary knowledge, such as vocabulary and grammar, or emphasize the development of learning methods, and cognitive and metacognitive strategies for students, while neglecting the stimulation of learning motivation necessary for the writing process [5].

This paper analyzes the factors that affect the motivation of high school students and proposes strategies to motivate them to learn English writing better.

2. Motivation

2.1. Meaning

Atkinson deemed motivation as the inner state and the dynamic psychological process in which the organism produces energy and impulses that directly drive it to act in a particular way and keep this action to meet some need [6]. It is the intrinsic reason that motivates people to act in order to achieve a certain goal, and it is a state of mind that motivates individuals to move and maintain their behaviour. According to Brown, "Motivation is probably the most frequently used catch-all term for explaining the success or failure of virtually any complex task" [7]. However, motivation is a complex and multi-faceted construct, and it involves many factors during language learning [8].

Learning a foreign language is expressed as an intrinsic and conscious desire to communicate with people and to acquire tools to actualize communication. It is a state of mind in which the learner is consciously motivated and active. The level and strength of motivation determine the quality and effectiveness of an individual's activities. Motivated foreign language learning is more effective, while the unmotivated treat foreign language learning as a burden. Motivation is a direct psychological motivation to learn a foreign language in order to achieve a certain goal.

2.2. Types

Different researchers have different classifications of English learning motivation, mainly in the following three categories which are integrative and instrumental motivation by Gardner and Lambert, long-term and short-term by Crookes and Schmidt and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation by Deci and Ryan [9,10,11].

Canadian social psychologists Gardner and Lambert, learning motivation is divided into integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation refers to a genuine personal interest in other languages, people and cultures, positive attitudes towards second language communication and the desire to integrate into second language communication [9]. Instrumental motivation refers to the perception of the practical benefits of second language ability and its utility, such as getting a better job or a higher salary.

Long-term motivation and short-term motivation are classified according to the time that learners spend in the learning process. Short-term motivation is a component of long-term motivation [10].

From the perspective of educational psychology, learning motivation is divided into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation [11]. Intrinsic motivation refers to the deep desire to study. Driven by intrinsic motivation, learners will be confident and joyful to devote themselves to the learning process. They claimed that intrinsic motivation is devoid of pressure toward particular outcomes and is focused on the activity for its own sake. Extrinsic motivation refers to external pressure and expectations, such as gaining rewards and recognition from others. Correspondingly, we expect that external demands and pressures or excessive involvement of self-esteem in outcomes will break up this spontaneous direct inner experience, as our research has tended to indicate. That is to

say, extrinsic motivation is encouraged by external factors, such as significant others and feedback etc. As Alfie Kohn explains, "Incentives, a version of what psychologists call extrinsic motivators, do not alter the attitudes that underline our behaviour. They do not create an enduring commitment to any value or action. Rather, incentives merely and temporarily change what we do." [12]

In Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory, it changed the previous status of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as complete opposites and instead saw them as a continuum. The four types of extrinsic motivation are interchangeable (external regulation, introjected regulation, identity regulation and integration regulation), and the transition from external to integrative regulation is a process of 'internalization', which is also a process of approaching intrinsic motivation. Self-determination theory also suggests that in order to transform from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, three basic psychological needs must be met, namely autonomy (the need to approve and be the source of one's behaviour), competence (through the need to interact positively with the environment) and relatedness (such as the need to perceive oneself attached to others and supported by others). Therefore, we should pay enough attention to both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

3. Obstacles hindering the motivation of English writing

Some students develop a strong sense of frustration and inferiority towards their English writing learning. Here are possible reasons. First, the writing task is overly complex for students who have little knowledge of where to start. Such aimless learning intimidates the improvement of writing. Besides, low writing grade affects the positive construction of students' self-beliefs and ultimately undermines their sense of self-worth and self-confidence. Secondly, when faced with an essay topic, students have insufficient experience to present concrete content. Students spend most of their time in school and lack social experience. They have an inadequate knowledge accumulation, and the demands of writing are beyond their ability, thus dampening students' motivation and reducing their incentive to write. Thirdly, teachers give students insufficient, if any, feedback on their writing. Some teachers only give students marks instead of detailed assessments pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of their work. Therefore, students cannot get a writing boost according to the elaborated evaluation, thus dampening their motivation. The negative pessimism in their self-evaluation process has caused them to lose confidence and interest in success, where negative emotions may lead to negative thinking.

4. Cultivating students' interest in learning English writing

Albert Einstein once proposed that the most important motivation for work was the pleasure of getting the result of the work as well as the recognition of the social value of that result. Therefore, the following are some specific ways of developing students' interest in writing.

The first is to clarify the importance of writing in English. The trend towards globalization has made social interaction no longer restricted to a particular country or region, and learning English well undoubtedly provides a platform for students to express themselves and realize their own values. If students understand the social value of their English writing knowledge and its role in external communication, and have experienced some of the benefits, they will gradually have more impetus for English writing.

The second is to help students set clear and appropriate learning goals. Faced with a complex writing task, this confusion and lack of focus can destroy students' confidence in achieving their writing goals. Setting goals helps maximize the achievement of writing objectives and creates positive psychological expectations, enabling students to take responsibility for their efforts with clear guidance. Teachers can guide students to set short-term, medium-term and long-term goals, from writing a good sentence to writing a good paragraph, in order that students can experience a sense of achievement and reinforce the joy of success with the consequence of building positive internal confidence and expectations.

The third is to use task-based learning strategies to stimulate students' interest in English writing. Teachers are suggested to create a problem setting that relates to students' existing knowledge and experience when students are equipped with adequate related ability. At the same time, students are motivated to use their former knowledge to solve new problems. Teachers can select issues that the students are interested in, taking into account their practical abilities, and direct students to cooperate to solve the problem. Therefore, their enthusiasm for writing is stimulated, and students are more engaging in the class.

The fourth is to use student feedback correctly to improve teachers' assessment strategies. Feedback is the return of information, reflections and more. In teaching, the teacher gets to know the students well, gets information from them, and adjusts teaching ideas according to their learning situation. On the other hand, students export learning information and then improve their teaching based on their feedback. This is feedback on learning. Teachers need to make proper use of students' feedback correctly and assess it appropriately. A large body of research has shown that when teachers give positive feedback to students, they not only let them know that they have done the task correctly, but also empower them by praising them. It also increases their motivation through praise, so positive feedback from teachers is more effective than negative feedback in promoting students' learning.

The fifth is to carry out a variety of extra-curricular activities. Writing is a process where input is as vital as output. Extra activities can play the role of reinforcement and knowledge supplement, enabling students to develop conscious and active learning habits. It is also an opportunity of changing students' aversion toward writing. Activities outside the classroom, such as English speech contests, English parties, English corners, learning English songs, talking to foreigners, provide materials for writing. They improve linguistic competence and bring in entertainment by creating an English learning environment.

5. Inducing motivational change and transfer

The famous American education expert Ausubel proposes that the relationship between motivation and learning is typically complementary and not a unidirectional one. This means that motivation facilitates learning by increasing behaviour, and the things learned, in turn, enhance learning. So, while motivating and developing students' motivation, the teachers need to be careful to guide them through learning. In this way, it is important to guide the transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. The following are some of how motivation can be enhanced in English writing.

5.1. Facilitating the transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation

Bandura suggests that when people have acquired specific knowledge and skills and have demonstrated their competence, the appropriate use of external reinforcement promotes the perception of one's competence, which is gradually transformed into intrinsic motivation by the student's self-regulation. The conversion of external motivation to internal motivation is subject to certain conditions and can only be completed when the external motivation has accumulated to a certain level and through the learner's internal self-regulation. If students are receptive to the external reinforcement of English writing, and if their English writing skills continue to improve due to the external reinforcement, their interest in learning English writing will increase, and this interest will gradually become an intrinsic motivation for learning. On the other hand, if students resist external reinforcement, their interest in learning to write in English will decline, and they will not be motivated to learn. Therefore, teachers should be careful in their approach to motivating and nurturing students' extrinsic motivation and should actively guide students to change from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation.

5.2. Facilitating the transfer of motivation to English writing

The self-determination theory proposed by Deci and Ryan shows that not only general knowledge and skills are transferable, but also students' motivation to learn. Before students are internally

motivated to learn something, teachers can actively use students' existing internal motivation in other areas of learning to transfer it to new learning activities. It is always easy for teachers to identify such students' interests if they look deeply enough. In English writing teaching, teachers can take advantage of the situation by guiding students to link their interests with the learning of English writing and turn them into an interest in learning, which is an effective means of developing motivation. Of course, the transfer of motivation is not arbitrary, and teachers need to be able to identify and analyse students' pre-existing motivations, grasp the positive aspects of their hobbies that are conducive to educational activities, and create the conditions to facilitate the transfer of motivation.

6. Conclusion

This study intends to explore the obstacles that hinder English writing for senior high school students and provide suggestions. As one of the five language skills, English is a common shortcoming in English learning for some senior high school students. Most students do not understand the importance of writing and are not interested in writing. They are passive learners and rarely write something in English independently or on their own initiative. They only do it at the request of their teachers or for exams. These phenomena indicate that most senior high school students are not motivated to write in English. Therefore, in the process of teaching English writing, teachers should pay attention to developing students' motivation to learn English writing and to improve their English writing skills.

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