

Investigation Report on the Effects of Teachers' Feedback on Wenhua College English Majors' Critical Writing

Ying Yang

Foreign Languages Division, Wenhua College, Hubei 430074, China.

How to cite this paper: Ying Yang. (2022). Investigation Report on the Effects of Teachers' Feedback on Wenhua College English Majors' Critical Writing. *The Educational Review, USA*, 6(10), 620-623. DOI: 10.26855/er.2022.10.017

Received: September 23, 2022

Accepted: October 22, 2022

Published: November 24, 2022

Corresponding author: Ying Yang, Foreign Languages Division, Wenhua College, Hubei 430074, China. **Email:** 30146269@qq.com

Abstract

As the prerequisite of innovative spirit and practical ability, the relationship between critical thinking and the second language writing has been widely researched by scholars at home and abroad since proposed last century. It is extensively acknowledged that critical thinking plays a pivotal role in the second language learning. However, there are few researches on the effects of teachers' feedback on the critical thinking reflected in the English writing. Being a significant part of teaching, more often than not, teachers' feedback, especially on the critical thinking is not highly valued in the English writing. Through the questionnaire survey on the English Majors in Wenhua College and the interview with some teachers, the thesis approaches to know the status quo of students' writing and teachers' feedback, combined with the factors influencing critical thinking, it finally proposes some suggestions on cultivating students' critical thinking.

Keywords

English writing, critical thinking, teachers' feedback

Critical thinking refers to the ability to discover, analyze and solve problems by using advanced cognitive means such as analysis, comparison, synthesis, reasoning and evaluation. The cultivation of critical thinking is the most important issue for deepening the reform of China's higher foreign language education. Writing and critical thinking are closely linked, because writing is a high-intensity thinking, and critical thinking runs through its whole process: from conception, writing to revision. Therefore, optimizing the writing teaching, especially improving teachers' feedback, is conducive to cultivating students' critical thinking.

1. Research Design

1.1 Research Subjects

In order to facilitate the research, the author conducted a questionnaire survey on 76 English majors and translation majors, and recovered 70 valid questionnaires.

1.2 Research Methods

This study adopts the methods of questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire design includes three sections: English writing, critical thinking and teachers' feedback. The first section aims to have a basic understanding of the students' writing, including their writing interest, purpose, motivation, expectation, etc. The second and third sections are the key parts of the questionnaire. There are 24 questions on the second section's critical thinking, including the students' cognition of critical thinking, evaluation of their own thinking ability, and application of specific critical thinking skills to

their writing. The five-point scale is used and positive scoring is employed. Each statement has five answers, namely “very consistent”, “consistent”, “uncertain”, “inconsistent” and “very inconsistent”, which are recorded as 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. The total score is between 24 and 120 points. There are 13 questions on the teachers’ feedback in the third section, including the form, focus, content, effect and willingness to adopt teachers’ feedback.

The interview is mainly conducted among teachers. The author interviewed teachers who have been teaching courses related to the English writing for a long time, such as basic English writing, academic paper writing and comprehensive English. The interview selected part of the questions in the third section of the questionnaire and jointly discussed the question of “How to improve students’ critical thinking through teachers’ feedback?”.

2. Research Results

2.1 Prominent Problems in the English Majors’ Writing

According to the results of the first section, English majors have three prominent problems in writing: first, 88.5% of the students do not like writing, fearing difficulties when encountered with challenges. Without internal motivation and confidence, they are more likely to complete the tasks assigned by the teacher and simply meet the needs of the examination; Secondly, 77.1% of the students commonly apply samples, lacking the ability to think critically and create personally; Finally, the biggest difficulties in the process of writing faced by 82.8% of the students are conception, unclear thinking and logical confusion.

2.2 Critical Thinking Problems in the English Writing

According to the critical thinking theory of the American Psychological Association (APA), the cognitive skills of critical thinking include interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation and self-regulation. Based on the results of the second section, if the total score is lower than 48, it indicates that the students’ critical thinking ability is poor; those with a total score of 48-72 indicate that there is much potential to develop their critical thinking; those with a total score of 72-96 indicate that they have strong critical thinking; If the total score is higher than 96, it indicates that their critical thinking is comprehensive. 70.8% of the students scored 48-72 points, showing there is much room for development.

From the perspective of all dimensions, the interpretation skills score the highest, which indicates that students have a good command of the relevance of the writing. After careful examination, they can basically ensure that the content meets the requirements of the writing with occasional digression; Inference skills rank second, indicating that students are fairly confident in the coherence of writing, for they usually make an outline before writing, and can use appropriate connectives to enhance the logic of writing; Analysis and explanation skills rank low, although the students are relatively clear about the major argument, most of the minor arguments are not clear, and they can not consciously avoid information irrelevant to the theme; The evaluation and self-regulation skills rank the lowest, for they can not use analogy, examples, quotations, data and other reasoning methods to support their arguments.

2.3 Teachers’ Feedback

Based on the writing feedback in the third section and the interview with the teachers, it is found that most English teachers focus on the language errors in reviewing the writing with few suggestions on content and structure. In class, the teachers do not train the critical thinking frequently, and the training methods are not diverse enough. For students, although it is generally believed that teachers’ feedback has many positive effects, such as enhancing writing motivation, increasing English knowledge reserves, mastering English writing skills and improving overall writing ability, and they like to read the teachers’ feedback and are very willing to accept the teachers’ modification suggestions, due to the lack of their initiative, they will not classify the feedback and find out the problems by analyzing the content and logic, and even do not know whether their correction is correct. Therefore, each student urgently needs the targeted feedback of the teacher who gives personalized guidance according to the logical loopholes reflected in his composition.

3. Factors Affecting the Critical Thinking

3.1 Internal Factors

The role of affective factors in foreign language learning has been confirmed and generally recognized by experts and scholars through many years of researches. Positive emotions can help learners to develop and tap their potential, while negative emotions can affect the development of critical thinking and innovative thinking. In the survey, it is found that the importance attached by the students to the English writing is one of the main factors affecting students’ interest in

writing.

At the same time, the learning style can not be ignored. Firstly, students are accustomed to passively accepting knowledge, like an empty bottle, being infused with content. Definitely, they are expected to learn well. The so-called “knowledge” means both “learning” and “asking”, with “learning” leading to “asking”, and “asking” promoting “learning”. Learning to “ask” is the key to doing well in “learning”. What’s more, from the analysis of questionnaires and interviews, it may also be related to the frequency of students’ writing. They usually do not take the initiative to write, and the biweekly composition training can not fully exercise their thinking ability.

3.2 External Factors

Teachers’ own qualities, such as professional knowledge, teaching ability, teaching experience and teaching attitude, play a very important role in tapping students’ potential and cultivating their critical thinking. In the survey and interviews, students and teachers both have such a consensus. Although in recent years, more and more attention has been paid to the cultivation of critical thinking of English majors, the writing teaching still focuses on the language, and the cultivation of critical thinking is always groping and has not yet formed a system. Teachers’ feedback can not comprehensively test students’ critical thinking, either. Therefore, teachers need to constantly improve their theoretical literacy and knowledge reserves, keep pace with the times, develop the habit of thinking, thinking well and thinking deeply, so as to cultivate students with strong critical thinking, innovative ideas and ways to find and solve problems.

4. Suggestions on Cultivating Students’ Critical Thinking

Based on the above survey, it is found that the overall critical thinking of English majors is not strong, and few students take the initiative to think with novel personal views and clear reasoning. It is closely related to the students’ long-term thinking habits and teachers’ teaching, especially the lack of personalized feedback. Therefore, it is suggested to improve the students’ critical thinking from the following two aspects:

4.1 Student-centered

First, deepen their understanding of the importance of critical thinking. In the questionnaire, only 36.4% of the students have a basic understanding of the critical thinking in writing. Only when we fully understand and recognize its importance ideologically can we attach great importance to the content and structure of writing. Secondly, we should adopt inquiry, heuristic and cooperative methods based on tasks to stimulate students’ enthusiasm, and provide them with opportunities to express their ideas freely. For example, when discussing sample essays and students’ model essays, instead of simply giving “yes” or “no”, “right” or “wrong” answers, we should objectively analyze them, fully affirm and actively guide them, and give suggestions for modification to create a good thinking atmosphere.

4.2 Teachers’ Feedback as a Guarantee

Teachers’ feedback can achieve personalized guidance and give detailed suggestions for specific thinking problems reflected in students’ writing. Then, through effective revision, students can gradually improve their thinking ability. Combined with the writing teaching experience in recent years, the author summarizes the common thinking loopholes in students’ Argumentative Writing from the content and structure, and designs the following “common problems in English Majors’ Argumentative Writing” after drawing on the “criteria for evaluating composition content parameters” (Wen Qiufang & Liu Runqing, 2006).

Primary indicator (Critical thinking)	Second indicator (Key words)	Third indicator (Descriptions)	Problems
Interpretation	Relevance to the topic	Ensure the relevance of the article to the topic, and do not deviate from the topic; It is in line with the theme and not be off-topic.	1. The subject is not clear; 2. It deviates from the subject.
Analysis & Explanation	Clear arguments	Major argument is clear and appropriate; Minor arguments are clear and appropriate.	1. There is no thesis statement; 2. The thesis statement is defective (too broad, narrow or a mixture of views); 3. There is no topic sentence in the body paragraphs; 4. The topic sentences are defective;

			5. The thesis statement is not consistent or related with the topic sentences.
Evaluation Self-regulation	& Deep reasoning	Minor arguments are logical; Examples are appropriate and specific.	1. Insufficient reasoning (no two or more minor arguments); 2. The reasoning is far fetched (loose connection between the topic sentence and supporting sentences) 3. The minor arguments are evenly made without any discrimination.
Inference	Coherence	The connection between minor arguments is logical and clear.	1. Improper logic sequence; 2. The transition between paragraphs is not smooth.

The Teaching Syllabus for English Majors in Colleges and Universities puts forward clear requirements for cultivating the critical thinking of English Majors: “Strengthen the cultivation of students’ critical thinking and innovation ability. In the teaching of professional courses, teachers should consciously train the students’ critical thinking such as analysis and synthesis, abstraction and generalization, multi-angle analysis of problems and problems-solving. They should correctly handle the relationship between language skills training and the cultivation of critical thinking and innovation ability, and neither can be neglected.” (English Panel of Foreign Language Teaching Counselling Committee of Colleges and Universities, 2000:12). By strengthening students’ understanding of the importance of critical thinking, students take the initiative to think. Meanwhile, teachers provide students with personalized feedback to think effectively, so as to achieve the goal of improving their critical thinking.

Funding

Phased result of the college education reform project “A Study on the Improvement of English Majors’ Critical Writing Based on the Students’ Autonomous Writing Revision” (Project number: J0900741425).

References

- English Panel of Foreign Language Teaching Counselling Committee of Colleges and Universities. Teaching Syllabus for English Majors in Colleges and Universities (2000 EDITION) [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Ruan Quanyou. The Realization of the Common Development of Teachers’ and Students’ Critical Literacy in Foreign Language Education in Colleges and Universities in the New Era [J]. Foreign Languages, 2020(5).
- Su Nina. The Exploration and Practice of the Blended Teaching Mode in College English Critical Writing Based on SPOC [J]. Journal of Inner Mongolia Agricultural University (Social Science Edition), 2020(4).
- Wen Qiufang, Liu Runqing. College Students’ Abstract Thinking Characteristics Reflected in English Argumentation Writing [J]. Foreign languages, 2006(2).
- Yang Xian. An Investigation on the Influence of Critical Thinking on English writing [J]. Educational Theory and Practice, 2014(21).