

A Study on the Construction of a Reading-to-Writing Activity Chain in Senior High School English Teaching Based on the Four Strands

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Abstract: The integration of reading and writing has become a major trend in senior high school English teaching. However, current practices still face several challenges, including inadequate input quality, insufficient linkage between reading and writing, limited internalization of language knowledge, and a lack of effective evaluation and feedback. To address these issues, this study constructs a reading-to-writing activity chain based on the Four Strands. The proposed model integrates the teaching process into four interconnected stages: text interpretation, language-focused learning, interactive output, and independent writing production, with evaluation embedded throughout the process. Through a case analysis based on a unit from PEP senior high school English textbooks, this study illustrates the design principles and implementation procedures of each stage. It is expected that the proposed activity chain can provide a practical and effective approach to promoting the integration of reading and writing, facilitating language internalization, and supporting the realization of the “integration of teaching, learning and assessment” in senior high school English classrooms.

Keywords: Reading-to-Writing; The Four Strands; Senior High School English; Activity Chain; Integration of Teaching

1. Introduction

Reading and writing are two core skills in English language learning and are closely interconnected in the process of language acquisition. *The Curriculum Standards for Senior High School English (2017 Edition, Revised in 2020)* (hereinafter referred to as the “the New Curriculum Standards”) classifies language competence into receptive and productive skills, with the former including

listening, reading, and viewing, and the latter involving speaking and writing. These two types of skills are expected to be interdependent and mutually reinforcing throughout the learning process. In addition, the latest editions of senior high school English textbooks have incorporated a “Reading-to-Writing” section. Against this background, the implementation of “reading-to-writing” teaching is of considerable significance.

However, under the influence of exam-oriented education, current reading-to-writing practices still exhibit several limitations. First, input quality is often poor, as reading instruction tends to remain at the level of surface comprehension, with insufficient attention to thematic meaning and deeper values. Second, the connection between reading and writing is weak, with a lack of effective transition from reading input to writing output. Third, language internalization is limited, as learners are seldom provided with opportunities to repeatedly process and apply language knowledge in meaningful contexts. Fourth, evaluation and feedback remain insufficient, characterized by one-dimensional assessment methods and a lack of continuous monitoring and targeted guidance. At the core of these issues is the absence of an effective mechanism linking reading and writing, which leads to a disconnect between learning and use and hinders the realization of the integration of teaching, learning and assessment.

2. The Essence of the Four Strands

In 2007, Nation proposed “the four strands” framework for language learning [1]. Building on this framework, Zhu adapted it for vocabulary teaching of the secondary school and further developed the “Four-Dimensional Language Curriculum Framework” [2]. The essence if the four strands are as follows: (1) meaning-focused input, which involves receptive language use through listening and reading, where learners primarily attend to

understanding messages, gaining information, or experiencing enjoyment; (2) language-focused learning, which refers to the deliberate attention to linguistic forms, including pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse features; (3) meaning-focused output, which involves productive language use through speaking and writing, with the primary aim of conveying meaning to others; (4) fluency development, which aims to help learners make fuller use of their existing language knowledge to increase the speed and ease of language use [1].

This framework emphasizes the balanced integration of the four strands in language teaching. In practice, teachers are expected to organize these dimensions around a unified theme in accordance with teaching contexts and learners' cognitive levels, incorporate activities from multiple strands into the teaching of specific language skills, and coordinate learning both inside and outside the classroom to ensure an appropriate distribution of time across the four strands within a given instructional period [1].

Reading and writing constitute a bidirectional and interactive cognitive process through which meaning is co-constructed by writers and readers [3]. The notion of "reading-to-writing" emphasizes making explicit the relationship between reading and writing in literacy instruction by leveraging their interaction and using texts to create authentic contexts that support learners' written production [4]. From this perspective, "reading-to-writing" can be understood as a multidimensional process of language acquisition that integrates multiple dimensions, ranging from reading input to writing output, and is therefore structurally aligned with the Four Strands.

Within this framework, meaning-focused input provides both linguistic and content resources for writing; language-focused learning directs learners' attention to and processing of linguistic forms; meaning-focused output engages learners in meaning expression and thematic construction; and fluency development facilitates the fluency of language use. Accordingly, the Four Strands offers a structured pathway for implementing reading-to-writing instruction in senior high school English, promoting a shift from a superficial linkage between reading and writing to their systematic integration.

3. Constructing the Activity Chain of "Reading-to-Writing" Teaching

Based on the four strands, this study proposes a "reading-to-writing" teaching chain that organizes the integration of reading and writing into four interconnected components: text interpretation, language-focused learning, interactive output, and independent writing production. Text interpretation is guided by holistic comprehension and the unit's overarching concept, activating learners' prior knowledge to support the construction of thematic meaning. Language-focused learning targets key vocabulary, sentence patterns, and textual organization within the passage, facilitating the internalization of linguistic knowledge through conscious attention to form. Interactive output builds on the thematic content of the text to create authentic communicative contexts, engaging learners in collaborative expression and serving as a bridge between input and output. Independent writing production, implemented through timed tasks, encourages learners to integrate their existing linguistic resources to produce coherent and meaningful texts, thereby fostering the comprehensive development of language proficiency.

The Integration of Teaching and Assessment underscores that assessment should function as an integral component of the instructional process, interacting dynamically with learning activities to promote the development of students' core competencies [5]. Guided by this principle, assessment need to be systematically embedded across all stages of the "reading-to-writing" activity chain to enable continuous monitoring and responsive feedback on learners' progress. Specifically, in the input phase, assessment should be anchored in learners' comprehension of textual meaning, with guided questioning and task-based activities employed to evaluate their understanding of thematic content and key linguistic features. In the output phase, a combination of peer assessment and teacher feedback should be adopted to provide multidimensional evaluation of learners' performance, thereby maximizing the formative function of assessment and supporting the ongoing refinement of the learning process.

To facilitate the progressive transition in reading and writing instruction from input to output and

from comprehension to expression, the activity chain of “reading-to-writing” teaching for senior high school English, based on the Four Strands, is presented in Figure 1.

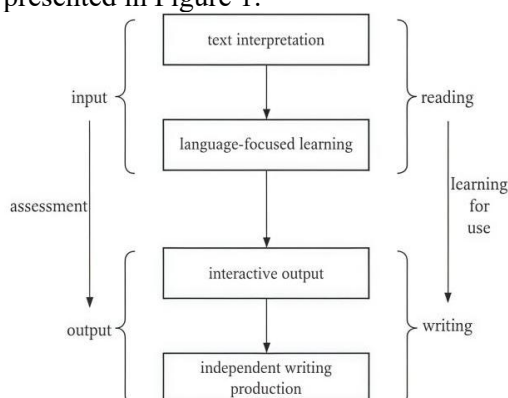


Figure 1. The Activity Chain of “Reading-to-Writing” in Senior High School Teaching Based on the Four Strands

4. A Case Study on the Activity Chain of “Reading-to-Writing” Teaching in Senior High School English

This study takes the two public posters presented in the Reading for Writing section of Unit 2 “Wildlife Protection” in the PEP Senior High School English Compulsory Book 2 as a case to analyze the implementation path of the reading-to-writing instructional activity chain from four dimensions. The two posters are titled “Give Ugly a Chance!” and “Don’t Make Paper with My Home!” respectively. In terms of content, both posters center on the theme of wildlife protection, guiding readers to reflect on the relationship between humans and nature from the perspectives of biodiversity conservation and habitat destruction, thus demonstrating a clear value orientation. In terms of form, the texts integrate images with concise and appealing language, exemplifying the typical features of public service posters.

4.1 Text Interpretation Oriented Toward Thematic Meaning Construction

The concept of “big ideas” serves as a crucial foundation for fostering subject core competencies. From this perspective, language learning should center on thematic meaning, establishing meaningful connections among content elements and uncovering the deeper educational value embedded in texts [6]. Meanwhile, within the meaning-focused input strand of the four strands, input materials should be familiar and engaging to learners, enabling

them to comprehend textual content and infer unfamiliar language forms through context and prior knowledge [1]. Accordingly, the text interpretation stage in “reading-to-writing” instruction should be guided by thematic meaning, activating learners’ background knowledge through authentic contexts and employing a sequence of guiding questions to support the gradual construction of textual understanding.

This unit falls under the theme of “Human and Nature”, specifically within the context of environmental protection, with a focus on wildlife conservation. The lesson can be conducted through the genre of public service posters, which integrate visual and textual information to activate learners’ emotional engagement and cognitive foundations related to the theme. For instance, during the lead-in stage, the teacher may present a variety of posters to guide learners in identifying the text type as a poster, followed by the introduction of the two posters from the textbook [7]. Questions such as “What can you see in these posters?” can be posed to elicit the theme of “wildlife protection.”

During the reading process, given the relatively clear structure of the texts, the teacher can take the thematic thread as the organizing principle and design a sequence of progressively challenging questions to advance classroom interaction, such as “What animals are in danger?”, “Why are they in danger?”, “What can we do to protect them?”, and “Why do we need to protect them?” Through this process, learners are guided to move from a concrete understanding of endangered species protection toward a more abstract awareness of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, thereby introducing key concepts such as “harmony” and facilitating the hierarchical construction of thematic meaning. At this stage, the teacher should conduct ongoing formative assessment of learners’ understanding of thematic meaning. Classroom evaluation should proceed in tandem with learning activities, with the teacher providing immediate diagnostic feedback based on students’ responses and making timely adjustments to instructional activities accordingly.

4.2 Language-Focused Learning Oriented in Thematic Context

The four strands emphasizes that, in addition to

meaning-focused input and output, the internalization of language knowledge requires deliberate attention to linguistic forms. Such language-focused learning enables learners to efficiently acquire vocabulary and syntactic rules, thereby providing essential support for language use [8]. Accordingly, after learners have developed an initial understanding of thematic meaning, instruction should be grounded in the textual context, guiding learners to attend to language forms from three dimensions: discourse structure, lexical expressions, and sentence patterns, thus laying a foundation for subsequent language production. Moreover, the primary goal of vocabulary instruction in reading lessons is to support text comprehension and meaning construction. Therefore, vocabulary teaching should be contextually embedded and naturally emerge from close engagement with the text, rather than being taught in isolation. Such an approach ensures that language learning is closely integrated with language use [9], thereby effectively preparing learners for subsequent output tasks.

For example, at the discourse level, teachers can guide learners to identify and summarize the key features of public service posters by posing questions such as “What makes this poster more attractive?” and “How does the writer attract readers’ attention?”, enabling them to recognize characteristics such as concise and eye-catching titles, the use of rhetorical devices like personification to enhance emotional appeal, and the use of statistics to strengthen persuasive effects; follow-up questioning can be employed to assess learners’ understanding. At the lexical level, instruction should be organized around the thematic context of “wildlife protection” by constructing a lexical network along the sequence of “endangered species— problems— reasons— actions,” thereby facilitating vocabulary acquisition and fostering learners’ associative thinking, supported by activities such as contextualized gap-filling and classification tasks. At the level of sentence patterns and expressions, teachers may extract transferable structures from the text, such as “When it comes to” and “pay attention to...”, and guide learners to practice them through paraphrasing and sentence expansion exercises, while dynamically adjusting instruction based on learners’ performance; an example of the thematic lexical network developed at this stage

is shown in Figure 2.

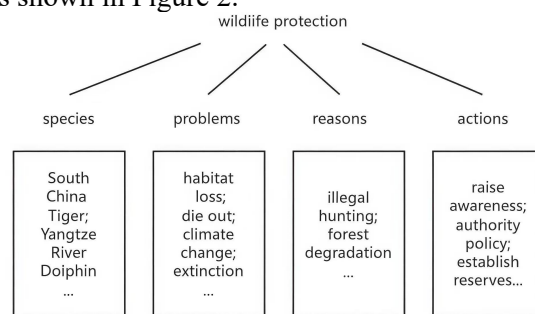


Figure 2. The Thematic Lexical Network of Wildlife

4.3 Interactive Output Driven by Collaborative Tasks

Within the four strands, meaning-focused output emphasizes that learners use language to convey information to others, with content grounded in relatively familiar topics and involving only a limited amount of unfamiliar language. Output activities should prioritize meaning expression rather than mere language practice [8]. Swain’s Output Hypothesis further suggests that language production is not only a process of expression but also a crucial mechanism for promoting metalinguistic reflection, as learners become aware of linguistic problems and adjust their language use through interaction, thereby deepening their mastery of linguistic forms [10]. In addition, the New Curriculum Standards advocate that instruction should be situated in authentic contexts and real-world problems, reflecting the principle of integrating thinking with application and emphasizing creative use of language. Therefore, post-reading output activities are designed to serve as a bridge toward learners’ eventual fluent expression, enabling both the expression of meaning and the application of linguistic forms through collaborative group work.

Based on the above principles, teachers can design meaningful task-based activities by creating authentic contexts to guide learners in achieving meaning-focused expression through interaction. For example, under the scenario of an “animal protection association rescuing endangered species”, teachers may introduce specific animals such as the South China tiger and the Chinese sturgeon, along with brief descriptions of their current living conditions, and then organize students to complete a public service poster design task in groups. Centered on the guiding question “How can we call on the public to protect endangered animals?”, learners

engage in discussion and planning, expressing their ideas and suggestions while integrating their existing linguistic resources, thereby facilitating the transition from language input to meaning-focused output.

Upon completion of the task, teachers may guide students to co-construct evaluation criteria, covering dimensions such as form, content, language, and value awareness, and organize peer assessment during group presentations. Through evaluation and feedback, learners are encouraged to reflect on their own performance and refine their language use by learning from others, thereby continuously enhancing their ability to express meaning through interactive communication.

4.4 Writing Output Oriented Toward Integrated Expression

According to the four strands, Nation emphasizes that fluency development refers to enhancing the speed, coherence, and ease of language use based on learners' existing linguistic resources, with the primary goal remaining the effective communication of meaning rather than the acquisition of new language forms [8]. Accordingly, output tasks should encourage learners to express themselves within relatively familiar contexts, and teachers may vary task genres and design more integrative activities to promote the internalization and transfer of language competence.

In classroom practice, building on the group poster design task in the previous stage, teachers can shift the mode of expression from collaborative presentation to individual writing, guiding learners to reorganize and articulate ideas based on previously constructed content. Meanwhile, the self-assessment rubric used in this stage can be refined from the evaluation criteria developed earlier, enabling learners to reflect on and evaluate their work in terms of content completeness, language use, and persuasive effectiveness.

Specifically, building on the group-based task, the teacher may create a new scenario in which an "animal protection association is organizing an offline publicity campaign," requiring students to independently compose a speech on the theme of "calling for wildlife protection" based on their previously designed posters. Within a limited time, learners are expected to integrate key elements such as

"problems—reasons—actions" and make use of target expressions learned in the lesson, including structures such as "When it comes to..." and "pay attention to...". This task transforms visual-textual information into a coherent written discourse, aiming to enhance learners' ability to use language in an integrated and cohesive manner. The evaluation rubric for this stage may be designed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Writing Assessment

| Dimensions | Criteria | Score(1-5) |
|----------------|--|------------|
| Content | Does your speech include problems, causes and solutions? | |
| Organization | Are your ideas logically organized? | |
| Language Use | Are your expressions clear and appropriate? | |
| Persuasiveness | Does it encourage the audience to take action? | |
| Awareness | Does it reflect responsibility towards nature? | |

In addition, teachers should provide a variety of supplementary reading materials in the post-class tasks for students, such as popular science texts and news reports related to wildlife conservation, so as to deepen learners' understanding of the theme and enrich their repertoire of relevant expressions in authentic contexts. The homework consists of two tasks: first, students are required to revise and refine their speeches based on classroom feedback; second, they are expected to share their reflections and insights from the supplementary reading in the following lesson, thereby promoting a cyclical development between input and output.

5. Conclusion

To strengthen the connection between reading and writing and to promote the coordinated development of linguistic meaning and form within thematic contexts, this study constructs a "reading-to-writing" teaching activity chain for senior high school English based on the four strands, comprising four stages: text interpretation, language-focused learning, interactive expression, and writing output. In addition, through a detailed case analysis, diversified and multi-agent assessment mechanisms are integrated into the instructional design, enabling learners to better achieve the

integration of learning and use and to enhance their overall communicative competence, thereby contributing to the development of core English competencies. Future research may further examine the applicability and effectiveness of the proposed activity chain across different thematic contexts and learner levels through longitudinal and quantitative approaches, with a view to refining both the theoretical framework and practical implementation of reading-to-writing instruction in English education.

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