



Developing College English Writing Course by Using Length Approach Combined with Task-based Learning to Enhance Writing Skills of Non-English Major Students in Xi'an University

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Received 24/05/2024

Revised 14/06/2024

Accepted 13/08/2024

Abstract

Background and Aims: This study was a research and development. The objectives of this research were 1) To study the background information relevant to developing College English Writing Courses by using the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning to Enhance the Writing Skills of Non-English major students. 2) To develop a College English Writing Course by using the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning to Enhance the Writing Skills of non-English major students. 3) To study the effectiveness of implementing a College English Writing Course by using the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning.

Materials and Methods: The samples were 40 first-year students, non-major English at Xi'an University, the People's Republic of China. They were derived by cluster random sampling. The instruments used in this research were 1) a College English Writing Course using the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning and its lesson plans, 2) an English writing skills test with .78 of reliability, and 3) a students' satisfaction questionnaire with .75 of reliability. The statistics used to analyze data included mean, standard deviation, and t-test for one sample.

Results: After learning through College English Writing Course by using the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning, the English Writing skills of students were higher than before learning with a statistical significance of .05 level, and (2) the student's satisfaction with College English Writing Course by using Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning was at a high level.

Conclusion: Learning through College English Writing Course by using the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning has both theoretical and practical significance. Firstly, the research proposes the role of the Length Approach and task-based learning based on output in second language acquisition. Secondly, it is confirmed in this study that language use and production is an essential part of language learning and that one can learn a Second language through using the language. Length Approach and task-based learning are suitable for daily teaching because they can enhance English writing skills for non-English major students and be helpful in the acquisition of a second language.

Keywords: College English Writing Course; Length Approach; Task-based Learning; Task-based Learning; English Writing Skill

Introduction

The Chinese government has been committed to improving the quality and level of English education. To promote English education reform, the Ministry of Education has issued a series of policy documents, encouraging innovative teaching methods, enhancing teacher training, optimizing teaching materials resources, and more.



In the 21st century, the rapid development of social, political, economic, and cultural aspects has placed higher demands on the quality of college English teaching. Therefore, as an integral part of college English education, college English writing instruction requires comprehensive innovation to adapt to and promote societal development (Zheng, 2015).

Since 2003, the reform of college English teaching has been initiated in some universities across the country, with the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education establishing the "College English Writing Course Teaching Requirements" project group. Based on extensive practical research, the project group completed the final draft of the "College English Writing Course Teaching Requirements" in November 2003 and accordingly published systematically structured college English textbooks, providing direction and support for the reform of college English teaching (Wang, 2013). At the same time, the academic community has reached a consensus on three key points regarding the reform of college English writing instruction: First, to promote the efficient and sustained development of college English writing instruction in the 21st century, and to better adapt college English writing instruction to the practical needs of social development, the characteristics of learners, and the features of foreign language disciplines, it is necessary to deepen the overall reform of college English teaching. Second, concerning the content of the reform in college English writing instruction, the focus needs to be on changing the educational objectives and teaching methods, emphasizing the cultivation of students' comprehensive English literacy, particularly improving their English language proficiency, developing English thinking patterns, and understanding English culture. Third, it is essential to research and formulate a complete and systematic plan for the reform of college English teaching, including clarifying the direction and concepts of the reform, specific reform objectives, detailed curriculum development plans, modern teaching support equipment, and a diverse evaluation system, among others. (Lai et al, 2011)

Questions

What is the effectiveness of implementing a College English Writing Course by using the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning to enhance English Writing skills for non-English major students?

Objectives

1. To compare the students' English writing skills before and after implementing the developed College English Writing Course by using the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning.
2. To compare the students' satisfaction after implementing the developed College English Writing Course by using the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning with the criterion set at 3.51.

Literature Review

College English Writing Course

Writing represents not only a valuable but also a unique mode of learning, which indicates the significance of writing. (Emig's 1977) A large number of studies have been carried out. Writing should motivate learners to think in L2 and thus develop their thinking and cognitive abilities with the reason that beyond a simple sentence, the writer also must be able to build and combine his ideas into cohesive and coherent paragraphs and texts. (Emig 1977) Writing can push students' learning in the following aspects. Firstly, through writing vocabulary and grammar as well as idioms can be strengthened.



Secondly, students will be able to apply the language to and beyond what they have learned in the writing exercises. Thirdly, when they are writing, students can be more aware of new linguistic forms. Apart from these, the effort to express new ideas and the constant use of brains, eyes, and hands also help to reinforce learning (Nation & Macalister, 2010).

Current College English Writing Course

The current college English writing course focuses on developing students' writing skills and enhancing their ability to effectively communicate in written English. The course typically covers various types of writing, including essays, reports, and research papers. Students are encouraged to improve their grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, as well as their critical thinking and analytical skills.

In the writing course, students learn how to plan and organize their writing, conduct research, and cite sources properly. They are taught techniques for developing coherent and well-structured paragraphs and essays. The course also emphasizes the importance of revision and editing to refine the clarity, coherence, and conciseness of their written work.

Problem in the college English writing Course

To improve the quality of English teaching, the Chinese government encourages universities to strengthen the training and development of English teachers. Teacher training covers aspects such as teaching methods, educational technology application, cross-cultural communication, and more.

After studying literature and conducting interviews with expert teachers regarding the current College English writing course, the researcher has identified a lot of problems:

1. The current course focuses mainly on the teacher's actions and neglects student feedback and their active roles in the learning process.
2. The objectives of the current course are limited to theoretical knowledge from textbooks, merely imparting the contents of the textbook to students without incorporating emotions and student autonomy.
3. The teaching strategies employed in the current course are not sufficiently effective. There is an excessive emphasis on grammar and language skills, while insufficient attention is given to fostering students' motivation.
4. The current evaluation system is not comprehensive enough, relying too heavily on single test scores and assessing only theoretical knowledge while neglecting students' practical application abilities. This evaluation method fails to fully reflect the actual outcomes of the course.

To address the issues present in the college English Writing course, the researcher needs to develop the college English Writing Course based on a Length Approach and Task-based learning to enhance English Writing skills for non-English major students.

Length Approach

According to Professor Wang Chuming, The Length Approach is characterized by the following four points: ① to teach a second language by writing long compositions, which is based on the Second Language Acquisition theory. The length Approach makes an alternative by shifting the concept of “learning to write” to “write to learn”. (Wang, 2004). In other words, the Length Approach suggests that one can acquire a language using writing. This point is consistent with the output hypothesis which holds the view that learners should be actively involved in the whole process of learning if they hope to master language skills; ② to change teachers' role from careful reading and correcting to carefully planning writing assignments. Writing long compositions can accelerate the internalization of what has



been learned. Students need not start an analysis of grammatical rules when receiving comprehensible input. However, when producing an output such as writing, they should first test the target language in their mind (Swain, 1993). The reason may be that when learners are about to express themselves, they should pay attention to ways of expression, remind themselves of the knowledge they have obtained, and consider carefully the grammatical rules, word collocations, and dictions. ③ to highlight the importance of affective factors in second language writing, and positive affective factors are of utmost importance for learning. Writing long compositions seems more challenging compared with writing short ones. In many cases, a learner would increase the sense of achievement when finding that he can accomplish a “tough” task. ④ to characterize learning by providing more language output opportunities and applying all potentialities of language learning into full performance, and Writing long compositions can help students transcend themselves, and open up their views. The concept of “length” in the Length Approach has comparative criteria. In general, a length that is nearest to students’ current potential is considered appropriate. It is hard to control many factors affecting the success of learning but to control the “length” of writing is much easier. (Zhao & Yang, (2019) With the improvement of students’ ability, the requirement of length increases step by step to make them surpass themselves. Compared to writing several short passages. Writing a long composition each time is more helpful in opening up students’ minds, increasing their sense of achievement, and building their confidence. (Wang, 2004).

Task-based Learning

Task-Based Learning (TBL) is an instructional approach that centers around the completion of tasks as the primary vehicle for language learning. In TBL, language learning occurs through the process of engaging students in meaningful, real-world tasks that require the use and application of language skills. These tasks are designed to mirror authentic situations and contexts, thereby promoting language acquisition naturally and purposefully.

In Task-Based Learning, language tasks serve as the focal point of instruction, to provide students with opportunities to actively use and practice the target language in context. Tasks are carefully designed to be challenging, relevant, and aligned with students' learning objectives. They often involve problem-solving, collaboration, and communication, encouraging students to apply their language skills in authentic ways.

Through the completion of tasks, students are exposed to language input, which they process and internalize as they work towards achieving task goals. This process fosters language acquisition by providing meaningful contexts for language use and promoting the development of language skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Key features of Task-Based Learning include:

Authenticity: Tasks are designed to reflect real-world situations and contexts, making language learning relevant and meaningful for students.

Task Complexity: Tasks are challenging and require students to engage in higher-order thinking skills, such as problem-solving and critical thinking.

Language Focus: Language learning occurs implicitly through the completion of tasks, with a focus on meaningful language use rather than explicit grammar instruction.

Collaboration: Tasks often involve collaboration and interaction among students, promoting communication and social interaction in the target language.



Feedback: Feedback is provided throughout the task process to support student learning and language development.

Overall, Task-Based Learning provides a dynamic and student-centered approach to language instruction, emphasizing the importance of meaningful communication and authentic language use in the learning process.

Synthesize the instructional strategy based on the College English Writing Course by using the Length Approach combined with Task-based learning

Learning Based on the characteristics of the Length approach and Task-based learning, the researcher combines two teaching methods in teaching steps. The five fundamental steps of teaching methods are typically as follows:

Setp1: Lead-in: Primarily, it stimulates students' interest, activates their relevant knowledge, and generates a desire for writing. (Task-based learning)

Setp2: Pre-task activity: Using a textbook to provide good language input: present and provide prompts for unfamiliar words that may pose writing obstacles for students, and introduce the task requirements and specific steps. (Task-based learning & Length approach)

Step 3: Design assignments carefully to inspire students' writing enthusiasm, assign writing tasks that cater to the students' characteristics, allowing them to have content to write about, and making them willing to write, able to write, and write at length. (Length approach)

Setp4: Discussion before writing and self-evaluation, peer-evaluation after writing (Length approach) (Task-based learning)

Step 5: Evaluation system and positive feedback. (Length approach)

English writing skills

Writing skills are a kind of speech skills. Psychologists have different ideas about its structure. From the perspective of qualitative analysis, some people think that it includes writing thinking, observation and analysis, choice of words and sentences, layout, and imitation model; Some people think that it includes the ability to examine the topic, establish ideas, collect materials, select materials and groups of materials, language expression and modify the composition. English writing skills refer to the abilities and competencies required to effectively communicate ideas, information, thoughts, or opinions in written form using the English language. It encompasses various aspects of writing, including grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, coherence, organization, clarity, and style. Proficient English writing skills involve the ability to convey meaning accurately and clearly, following the conventions and rules of English grammar and syntax. This includes proper usage of tenses, punctuation, capitalization, and sentence formation.

An important aspect of English writing skills is vocabulary. A wide range of words and expressions allows writers to express their ideas precisely and vividly, enhancing the quality of their writing. Understanding word choice, synonyms, antonyms, idiomatic expressions, and appropriate registers are essential components of strong writing skills.

Coherence and organization play a crucial role in effective writing. This involves structuring ideas logically and coherently arranging them to ensure a smooth flow of thoughts. The use of cohesive devices like transition words, linking phrases, and paragraph development supports the overall coherence of the written piece.

Clarity is another key element in English writing skills. Writers need to express their ideas clearly and concisely, avoiding ambiguity and confusion. Clear writing requires careful attention to sentence structure, avoiding unnecessary complexity or convoluted constructions.

The process of writing entails high-order thinking processes that are integral to learning, among them the meta-cognitive processes required by critical thinking and problem solving, which implies that teachers capitalize on the means of writing to serve their pedagogical ends. That is to say, to give students more opportunities to write, a more thoughtful engagement with the writing process, and more opportunities for guidance, feedback, and revision markedly would improve writing skills and facilitate curriculum learning.

Conceptual Framework

Develop the basic information and Problems of the requirements of the College English Writing Course based on the Length Approach combined with Task-Based learning to enhance the English writing skills of non-English major students at Xi'an University.

The conceptual framework of development: Length Approach and Task-Based Learning to enhance the English writing skills for non-English major students in Xi'an University.

Develop the basic information and requirements of the College English Writing Course based on a Length Approach and Task-Based Learning to enhance the English writing skills of non-English major students at Xi'an University.

Determine the effectiveness of implementing the Length Approach combined with Task-Based Learning to enhance the English writing skills of non-English major students at Xi'an University.

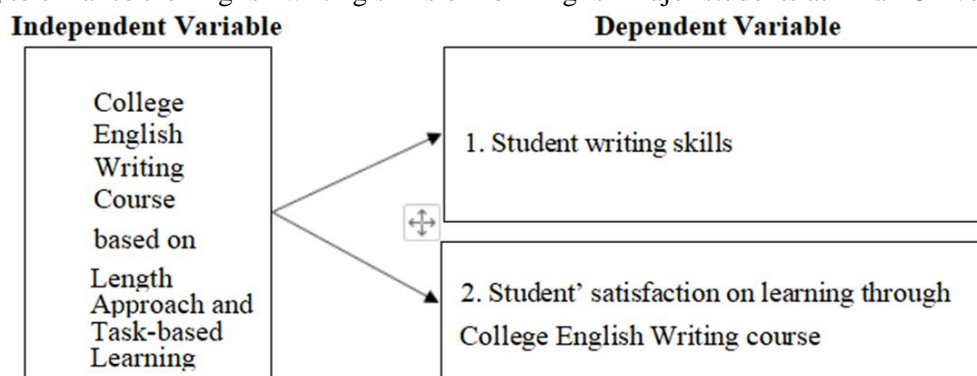


Figure 1 The independent variable and dependent variable

Methodology

Population and samples: The population in this study was about 500 non-English major first-year students at the undergraduate level at Xi'an University, China. The sample of this study was 1 classroom (approximately 40 students/classroom) of non-English-major first-year students studying in the first semester of the 2022 academic year at Xi'an University. They were selected by using the cluster random sampling method.

Research instruments:

1. College English Writing Course by using a Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning. Five experts evaluated the draft course, in the 11 items of the: College English Writing Course based on the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning evaluation form, the lowest mean



score was 3.8(SD=0.44), and the highest mean score was 4.6(SD=0.55). It was revealed that the College English Writing Course based on Length Approach and Task-based Learning was at a high level.

2. Lesson plans on rational number operation course: Five experts evaluated the eight lesson plans. According to the expert evaluation form, the lowest mean score was 4.3(SD=0.47), and the highest mean score was 4.6(SD=0.49). It was revealed that the lesson plan was at a high level.

3. English writing skills tests: The test for students' writing skills consisted of 4 parts which had an item discrimination range from 0.47-0.66, an item difficulty range from 0.715-.760, and reliability at 0.784, which means the test was qualified and can be used to collect data.

4. Student satisfaction questionnaire: The questionnaire is provided to 5 experts for content validity check and suggestions. Therefore, the reliability of the student satisfaction questionnaire meets the requirements, The draft satisfaction questionnaire had item discrimination ranging from 0.22-0.52, and reliability at .747 which means the satisfaction questionnaire was qualified and can be used to collect data.

Data collection

The curriculum was implemented in the samples in the first semester of the 2022 academic year. The procedures of data collection during the curriculum implementation process were as follows: 1) The samples were given the pretest for measuring English Writing Skills with constructed instruments. The instruments consisted of 4 parts, the samples that were assigned as experimental groups were taught by using Instruction through English Writing Skills. This group was taught through 8 Lesson plans and the allocation time for instruction was 32 hours. During instruction through the curriculum implementation process, the researcher observed and recorded data, including the teaching process, learning process, classroom atmosphere, students' behavior, and teacher's behavior that occurred in the classroom. 3) After finishing the instruction, the samples received the posttest by using the same instrument as the pretest. 4) The samples were given the students' satisfaction questionnaire to express their opinions toward the curriculum.

Data analysis

In this study, quantitative data were analyzed by using the statistical program in line with the research objectives. Statistics were used to determine the different significance at .05 level of scores on English Writing Skills before and after learning through College English Writing Course by using the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning; (1) by using a t-test for the dependent sample. Statistics were used to assess the student's satisfaction with College English Writing Courses by using the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning. (2) by using arithmetic mean and standard deviation and t-test for one sample. Moreover, qualitative data were analyzed and interpreted by content analysis and interpretation through the inductive method.

Results

The finding of comparison of English skills before and after learning through college English Writing course based on Length approach and task-based learning.

The findings of the comparison of English writing skills between pretest and post-test scores which were analyzed by using a t-test for the dependent sample were presented in the below table. This table aimed to answer the research objective about whether college English courses based on a length approach combined with task-based learning were able to enhance student writing skills.



Table 1 The finding comparing the different scores of English Writing skills before and after learning through college English Writing courses based on the Length approach and task-based learning (n=40)

Group	Full scores	n	Pre-test scores		Posttest scores		t	p
			M	SD	M	SD		
Experimental group	60	40	39.98	5.28	43.95	5.12	59.45*	0.001

* The significance level: $p < .01$.

The results of the English Writing skills before and after learning through the college English Writing course based on the Length approach and task-based learning, was found that the mean scores of pretests of English writing skills were 39.98, SD was 5.28, and mean scores of posttests was 43.95, SD was 5.12. Moreover, it aimed to examine the different scores of before-and-after learning through college English Writing courses based on the Length approach and Task-Based Learning to enhance English Writing skills. The finding of this table revealed that after learning through a college English Writing course based on Length approach and Task-Based Learning, posttest scores of English writing skills was greater than pretest scores at .05 level of statistical significance ($t = 59.45$ $p < .05$). The average scores of the study developed increasingly higher than pretest.

The finding of comparison of Students' satisfaction after learning through college English Writing course based on Length approach and task-based learning
The findings of a comparison of students' satisfaction after learning through the College English Writing Course by using the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning with the criterion set at 70% which were analyzed by using a t-test for one sample were presented in the below table. This table aimed to answer the research objective about whether students are satisfied with learning through College English Writing Courses by using the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning.

Table 2 Mean score and satisfaction level of students satisfaction about College English Writing Course by using the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning

Question number of satisfaction questionnaire				
Question aspect	Question number	M	SD	Level
Teaching objectives aspect	1. Satisfaction with whether the teaching objectives of the college English writing course are clear and precise.	4.40	0.55	High level
	2. Satisfaction with the clarity of teaching objectives of the college English writing course	4.50	0.56	High level
	3. Satisfaction with the teaching objectives of the college English writing course meets the requirements of improving English Writing skills	4.40	0.55	High level
Teaching content aspect	4. The satisfaction of whether the teaching content of college English writing courses is easy to understand	3.95	0.50	High level
	5. Satisfaction with whether the teaching content of college English writing course is new and can stimulate learning interest	4.80	0.41	High level
	6. Satisfaction of whether the teaching content of college English writing course has practical significance	4.45	0.50	High level
Question number of satisfaction questionnaire		M	SD	Satisfaction



Question number of satisfaction questionnaire				
Question aspect	Question number	M	SD	Level
Question aspect	Question number			Level
Teaching instructional strategy aspect	7. Satisfaction with whether the instruction strategy of college English writing course can stimulate students' writing skills	4.15	0.43	High level
	8. Satisfaction with whether teachers of college English writing courses explain the teaching content clearly	4.58	0.50	High level
	9. Satisfaction with effective communication between teachers and students of college English writing course	4.48	0.59	High level
	10. Satisfaction with the steps of the teaching process design of the college English writing course	4.42	0.55	High level
	11. Satisfaction with the teaching approach (Length Approach and Task-based Learning) of college English writing course to improve the classroom atmosphere	4.53	0.55	Very high level
	12. Satisfaction with class hour allocation of teaching methods of college English writing course	4.34	0.49	High level
	13. Satisfaction with the teaching approach of college English writing course to improve students' English writing skills	4.53	0.55	Very high level
Media and resources aspect	14. Satisfaction with the combination of teaching resources and media of practical problems	4.40	0.63	High level
	15. Satisfaction with teaching resources and media to improve English writing skills	4.01	0.55	High level
	16. Every student is satisfied with teaching resources and media used in the college English writing course	4.52	0.55	Very high level
Assessment and evaluation aspect	17. Satisfaction with the assignment of the college English writing course	4.53	0.51	Very high level
	18. Satisfaction with the number of assignments for college English writing course	4.45	0.64	High level
	19. The evaluation system of this course can differentiate student English writing skills in learning college English writing courses.	4.55	0.55	Very high level
	20. Satisfaction with the effectiveness of the evaluation system of this course.	4.55	0.50	Very high level

As presented in Table 14, in the 20 items of the satisfaction questionnaire, the lowest mean score was 3.95 (SD=0.50), and the highest mean score was 4.55 (SD=0.55). The result of this Table showed that the student's satisfaction of the college English course based on the Length approach and task-based learning was high level (M= 4.43, SD=0.53)

Discussion

1. The College English Writing Course by using the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning can enhance the English writing skills of non-English major students in Xi'an University. This may be due to the following four reasons:



1.1 This can be attributed to the fact that the length approach and task-based learning methods ignited students' interest, transforming their learning from a passive teacher's role process to an active one, thereby enhancing enthusiasm and initiative in learning.

1.2 The length approach and task-based learning indeed seem to contribute to improving English as a Foreign Language students' attitudes and confidence in English writing. The length approach and task-based learning prove to be a feasible and effective method in second language teaching. The length approach and task-based learning can increase students' output practice, fostering awareness of learners towards their production levels. In this way, comprehension and output are intertwined, leading to a deeper processing of input, turning it into absorption and output.

1.3 In the classroom, there is an intimate interaction between teachers and students, communication and discussion among students, mutual support and understanding within the team, promoting effective learning, and improving student collaboration. Encouraging students to write extensively helps overcome writing apprehension, effectively cultivating their English writing abilities

1.4 The length approach and task-based learning can assist students in alleviating anxiety and boosting their confidence, thereby enhancing their motivation, and increasing both the quantity and quality of their written output. The length approach and task-based learning can be seen as a pioneer in this field.

2. Through length approach learning combined with task-based learning students' satisfaction is improved. This may be due to the following two reasons:

2.1 The length approach and task-based learning can make non-English major students more confident, more autonomous, and less stressed. Due to the relatively high proportion of the total score that length occupies and the learner-determined nature of the topics.

2.2 The length approach and task-based learning can greatly stimulate non-English major students to generate a substantial amount of written output. The length approach and task-based learning can play a positive role in improving the writing abilities of non-English major students in practical writing.

2.3 Adopting a student-centered teaching approach, allowing students to participate deeply in the teaching process.

2.4 After class, course evaluation is conducted through the length approach assessment method. Students can use the knowledge and skills acquired in class to solve practical problems, further increasing positive feedback. The implementation of these methods may effectively improve students' English writing skills and satisfaction.

Conclusion

The researcher developed and assessed a College English writing Course at Xi'an University, employing a Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning. Drawing insights from literature reviews, interviews, and expert evaluations, the course structure was meticulously crafted, encompassing principles, objectives, content, instructional strategies, media and resources, and assessment and evaluation woven into the instruction across ten steps. The course, comprising eight units spanning diverse themes encompassed 32 periods aimed at enhancing English writing skills. With 40 non-English major first-year students participating, English writing skills were assessed using pre- and post-tests, revealing significant improvements post-intervention.



In this study, SPSS software was used to evaluate the students' satisfaction with the College English Writing Course by using the Length Approach combined with Task-based Learning. The finding of comparison of students' satisfaction after learning through the developed College English writing Course showed that students; satisfaction was higher than the determined criterion of 70% at a .05 level of statistical significance.

Recommendations

Recommendation for implication

1. Teachers should enhance their knowledge and skills in the methods of length approach and task-based learning.
2. Encourage students to extensively utilize the techniques of length approach and task-based learning.
3. Designing writing tasks in the teaching process is a crucial aspect of stimulating student interest.
4. Teachers need training on how to improve length approach and task-based learning.

In summary, strengthening and improving length approach and task-based learning enhancing non-English majors' writing skills, optimizing classroom writing tasks, and effectively assigning writing tasks play a significant role in improving non-English major writing skills and enhancing classroom teaching effectiveness.

Recommendation for further research

1. Due to limitations in academic level and external resources, this study still has some shortcomings in exploring the teaching methods of length approach and task-based learning. Further exploration and experimentation are needed in the subsequent stages.
2. One class cannot represent the entire proficiency level of non-English major students, so the teaching methods of length approach and task-based learning need to be validated in more schools to make the experimental results more convincing.
3. In future teaching activities, this study will continue to reflect on and improve the shortcomings of length approach and task-based learning in practice. In my opinion, with the continuous popularization of information technology and in-depth research, the value of length approach and task-based learning will be more perfectly reflected in future teaching. Due to my limited practice time and lack of experience in the initial stage of exploration, the research on the teaching mode of length approach and task-based learning has just started. In future teaching, I will continue to devote myself to the implementation of the length approach and task-based learning, further improve the teaching mode of the length approach and task-based learning, and provide references for other teachers. It is hoped that the masses of educators can further explore and study the teaching mode of length approach and task-based learning, change the traditional concept, conform to the trend of teaching reform, and promote the development of education cause in our country.



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