

An Analysis of the Critical Role of “Reading and Writing” in Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract: *This thesis aims to analyze the advantages of English reading and writing in second language acquisition from cognitive and linguistic perspectives. In the case of reading, it requires learners to comprehend the full text and translate their knowledge into English skills. Reading helps learners focus on details, think critically, and reflect on their English learning process. In writing, learners can process more information in English in a broader way and at a deeper level, which is why writing in English is important. This investment in learning the details of English demonstrates the importance of reading and writing. Even English listening and speaking tasks require the necessary involvement of reading and writing. Moreover, reading and writing should be prioritized when evaluating long-term memorization, comprehension depth, practicality, and expression correctness, particularly when learners require essential instruction. This study concludes that reading and writing are important in second language acquisition in terms of thinking processes and improving English language skills.*

Keywords: *second language acquisition; English reading and writing; learning strategies*

1. Introduction

The current study concludes that reading is a key component in second language acquisition as it helps learners to develop their vocabulary, grammar, and language skills. Writing also plays an important role in second language acquisition as it provides learners with opportunities to practice language use. There are many studies on language testing and assessment, the language acquisition process of English learners and how to teach English as a second language. There are also studies that mention the current lack of research on improving language skills through reading and writing in English.

This thesis aims to analyze the critical role of reading and writing in second language acquisition. In terms of the method, this thesis uses the literature review method to gather and analyze the available relevant research and this thesis is written based on these findings. A selection of texts from *Contemporary College English* and *2022 National Paper A English* is used as examples here.

This chapter briefly identifies the background, the aim, the methods, and the structure of this thesis. Chapter 2 provides a literature review that explains why reading and writing are important due to strategies, long-term memory, and academic language. Chapter 3 Reasons for Prioritizing “Reading and Writing” analyze the rationale from the linguistic and cognitive perspectives. In this chapter, the thesis firstly explains that reading and writing is part of listening exercises. Secondly, it explains that reading and writing are important because of the cognitive processing and deep understanding through processes and frameworks. This chapter focuses on the importance of reading and writing by analyzing Hayes and Flower’s model of writing, Deane’s study on writing and cognition, and Villanueva’s study on reading strategies. Finally, Chapter 4 summarizes the significance of the study and suggests possible areas for improvement. The study concludes that reading and writing deepen learners’ understanding of the English language and promote logical thinking in English. Moreover, reading and writing should be given priority in the areas of depth of understanding, practicability, and accuracy of expression. Reading and writing are therefore crucial in second language acquisition.

2. Literature Review

There are relatively few resources addressing the importance of reading and writing in the

acquisition of English as a second foreign language. Furthermore, existing research tends to prioritize listening and speaking skills in English learning. However, it is not always reasonable to give listening and speaking the priority throughout the entire English learning process and in all learning contexts.

As the thesis will illustrate the importance of reading and writing from the perspective of learning strategies and skills, so it is essential to show that reading and writing are important because of them. Grabe and Stoller state that the use of working memory in reading helps to process vocabulary and grammar knowledge^[6]. It is beneficial for second language learners to use a framework or model while reading to increase their comprehension of texts^[6]. Thus, teaching students effective reading strategies is crucial to their learning, and if students do not master these strategies, they may struggle and lose confidence when reading. Moreover, reading and writing skills are important in achieving long-term language proficiency and academic success. Speaking and listening skills are important for effective communication. To help learners make the best use of their knowledge, the fluency development strand is supposed to include all the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and most likely, accuracy, intricacy, and fluency are interconnected^[9].

Luo and Dong explain that audiovisual methods do not always produce the best results, for example, in reading and writing instruction, where they are not sufficiently persuasive^[14]. It is not easy to develop long-lasting memory through speaking exercises^[14]. Fan and Pang's *Pedagogy of English Listening and Speaking* gives a wealth of examples of spoken conversations, most of which are communicative activities designed to be close to everyday learning and daily situations^[5]. Although spoken communication has the advantage of more timely feedback in expressing everyday thoughts and demonstrating the vividness of language, the importance of a more in-depth processing of information over a longer period of time should be valued too. When producing more complex expressions such as analysis and conclusions or when no longer relying on simple sentences for input, a thorough understanding and comparison of the grammatical structures necessitates deep processing. Although it depends on the individual, such in-depth thinking requires more time for reflection, additional space for cognitive activities, and potentially specialized linguistic tools. Hayes and Flower's study on the model of writing reveals the complexity of writing, with each small framework element acting as a component and a processing structure flow that can break down into a detailed flow chart^[7]:

Writing mobilizes a large number of cognitive processes such as generating, organizing, translating, reviewing, and editing^[7]. Other than that, reading texts and writing allows for deep processing of text, syntax and grammar^[7]. Moreover, reading was part of the reviewing process in writing^[7]. The framework model they provided also reveals the vital role of long-term memory in writing.

In addition to this, writing helps to organize the structure of a text, use various conjunctions to show the intended inter-sentential semantic relationships, and develop logical arguments in English. In the study *Writing Assessment and Cognition* written by Deane, reading is not isolated from writing, and writing is not isolated from reading, he also states:

Reading includes all the activities that support effective comprehension, which may include writing notes, asking reflective questions, and participating in a range of other activities^[4]. In the same way, writing includes skills that involve reading and critical thinking, particularly during revision^[4]. Other than that, writing builds upon a broad foundation of prerequisite literacy skills, and requires the writer to use critical thinking skills to solve linguistic problems for a better understanding of the text^[4].

Hayes, Flowers, and Deane share a similar view that writing is a complex process that involves various components and requires strategic thinking and planning. In writing, therefore, learners can process more information in English in a broader way and at a deeper level. In the case of reading, it can be a separate activity from writing to gather and compare information. It is also meaningful as a part of the review in writing by using long-term memory. Thus, reading and writing are important in English language learning because of the amount of effective information that is transferred through tools such as strategies and skills.

3. Reasons for Prioritizing “Reading and Writing”

3.1 Cognition and Priority

In listening tests, brief reading and writing are necessary parts of the process. Yu's study, the *Effect of Listening and Speaking Exercises on the Incidental Acquisition of Second Language Vocabulary* argues that:

Visual images aid memory, and deeper information processing are beneficial for English learning [16]. In this study, the Chinese students conducted the listening task not only did listening exercises, but also corrected errors and verified learning by visual reviews and writing during the test [16].

Therefore, reading and writing are important because they play an essential role in listening tests. The importance of visualization as an assistance to listening practice is also shown in Vandergrift's study *Listening to Learn or Learning to Listen*:

This study refers to the role of captioning support in listening practice, so that visual information will assist in listening practice [12]. In the 'first verification stage', students compare what they have written with peers [12]. The 'second verification stage' mainly refers to writing down additional details that they understood and taking notes [12]. In the 'reflection stage', students write down goals for next listening task [12]. Therefore, in those stages there is a clear role for the mental processing of skimming the text (reading) and taking notes (writing).

Therefore, visual scanning as a form of reading has a supportive effect on listening, which includes comprehension of the listening text. Reading and writing are important also because of their process and framework. The complex processes make reading and writing more practicable. An important cognitive activity and learning strategy involved in both reading and writing is problem-solving. Villanueva's research shows that the ultimate goal of problem-solving strategy is to aid the reader's comprehension, and the most often used problem-solving reading strategy include rereading to deepen comprehension, track the text, and understand the insight meaning [13]. Research into problem-solving strategy in writing demonstrates that the translation of knowledge combined with advanced planning is conducive to producing higher quality texts and improving the understanding of the language [1]. Vandergrift's study *Listening to Learn or Learning to Listen* shows that 'question-answer' is an important skill in listening exercise [12]. If a comparison is made between 'problem-solving' in reading and 'question-answer' in listening, then the limitations of 'question-answer' are that it does not cover data on a large scale, and it is not conducive to a deeper understanding of all content in terms of depth of thought, whereas reading and writing are more valuable because they have more training time and data involved. In Hayes and Flower's study, writing task has three main parts, including the test environment, the writer's long-term memory, and the writing process [7]. When compared to listening and speaking, reading and writing are more advantageous in aiding comprehension of the English text at a deeper level using appropriate strategies. Therefore, reading and writing involve much more complex cognitive activities than listening and speaking, and they provide opportunities to learn various English language processes, such as vocabulary and grammar, that are useful for comprehending complicated English text.

Listening task does not require a grasp of the overall structure of the text. Vandergrift's study reveals that not all the details are within the listening target, so with limited knowledge of the language, the listening text can hardly be processed [12]. In terms of reading, it is important for the reader to grasp both the whole concept of the text and the details of the text. Reading is a collection of actions implying deep thinking, different information processing and critical thinking. A text is composed of sentences and second language grammar in sentences may cause learners to make prediction errors in understanding the meaning of the sentence as a second language learner, so learners need to analyze and collect information in the errors [8]. Thus, even in the case of short sentences, there is information to analyze and learn from. In terms of speaking, communication for the purpose of everyday conversation is the natural linguistic expression of most normal people in normal circumstances; for spoken or written, it requires additional training [2]. In contrast to ordinary listening and speaking exercises, the writing test focuses on the written form, validity and quality of the text. Writing demands efficiency too, as it involves both expressing one's ideas in written form and communicating these ideas clearly and effectively to the reader. Through writing strategies, writers can learn to produce texts in a written form that is meaningful, relevant, fair, clear, precise, complex, correct, and logical [4]. As a result, reading and writing are therefore more desirable ways of learning knowledge.

Reading and writing have an advantage in terms of practicability, depth of understanding, and accuracy of expression. When the aim is to improve these areas, the priority should be given to reading and writing in the learning content.

3.2 Case Analysis

The text materials and interpretations are from Yang's *Contemporary College English*. According to the reading strategy, readers should attend to the details in the text they are reading and access the

knowledge stored in their minds as appropriate ^[13]. The following examples explain how to process grammatical information, ask questions and solve problems based on difficult information in the text, and ultimately improve their understanding of the text. The following are specific text examples:

Example 1: “If banks were required to sell wallets and money belts, they might act less like churches.” (from “The Boy and the Bank Officer”)

According to Yang, the word “church” evokes certain associations, as people usually think of a church as the spokesman of God, a powerful organization that controls one’s life and can interfere in it ^[15]. Therefore, the author finds it absurd for banks to resemble churches ^[15]. This sentence is in the subjunctive mood, conveying an unfortunate reality ^[15].

Example 2: “I zeroed in on the officer.” (from “The Boy and the Bank Officer”)

Originally, “to zero in on someone” means “to aim a gun at a target” ^[15]. The author again uses this exaggerated expression for humor ^[15].

Example 3: “... has been shaking the boy down...” (from “The Nightingale and the Rose”)

According to the context, the reader can learn that the meaning of the sentence is “... has been getting money from the boy by using threats...” and “to shake down” is a slang expression ^[15].

Example 4: “... and redder than the great fans of coral.” (from “The Nightingale and the Rose”)

It is worth noting that the metaphorical use of the word “fan”, which refers to anything resembling a fan ^[15].

Example 5: “... what is the heart of a bird compared to the heart of a man?” (from “The Nightingale and the Rose”)

The heart of a bird is nothing compared to the heart of a man ^[15]. In other words, for the Nightingale, the student’s love is much more important than her life ^[15]. It is another example of a rhetorical question—a question in form, but a statement in meaning ^[15].

Example 6: “Be happy, ... you shall have your red rose.” (from “The Nightingale and the Rose”)

The modal verb “shall” is used here to convey a solemn promise ^[15]. It is used to say that something will definitely happen ^[15]. The reader should notice that this usage is considered formal and old-fashioned ^[15].

Example 7: “... for she was lying dead in the long grass, ...” (from “The Nightingale and the Rose”)

The use of “in” rather than “on” is to emphasize the tallness and thickness of the grass ^[15].

Example 8: “His childhood and youth were long past, and his own children had grown up and gone.” (from “Christmas Day in the Morning”)

The reader may ask the question: “What is meant by ‘his childhood and youth were long past’?” After reflection, one might conclude that this means he is no longer young ^[15]. Another question might be asked: “What is the meaning of ‘gone’ here?” Another possible conclusion that could be drawn from thinking about the text is that it means his children have left home ^[15].

Example 9: “A thought struck him like a silver dagger.” (from “Christmas Day in the Morning”)

An idea suddenly crossed his mind. The metaphor of a silver dagger is used to suggest the lightning speed with which the brilliant idea flashed across his mind ^[15].

Example 10: “His dancing heart was ready to jump from his body.” (from “Christmas Day in the Morning”)

The word “dancing” is used here to suggest that he was very excited, and his heart was beating fast and “dancing” with joy ^[15].

The examples above illustrate how readers can learn about grammar, diction, and rhetoric based on their reading of a text. By doing so, they can better understand the deeper meanings that authors seek to express.

It is important to improve cognitive skills in writing and it requires substantial time and reflection to avoid errors. However, doing so can benefit the writer by developing critical thinking skills and using long-term memory ^[4]. According to Flower and Hayes’s study, the reviewing process is one of the processes of writing that requires the writer to read the text that has been produced and to correct it to

improve its quality and the accuracy of meaning ^[7]. The process of text production includes fault detector to identify errors such as grammatical errors, incorrect words and missing context ^[7]. The writer can fix these errors to achieve standard language conventions, accuracy of meaning, better reader understanding, and better reader acceptance ^[7]. The following is a writing correction test from the writing section of the 2022 National Unified Examination for Higher Education Admissions (National Paper A), along with analyses:

Sentence 1: My father often took me to his hospital when I was off my school ^[3].

“Be off school” is a fixed collocation means “not going to school”. Therefore, delete the word “my” after “off” ^[11].

Sentence 2: He showed me how his medical instruments was used ^[3].

According to the structure of the sentence, this sentence is an object clause guided by the word “how” ^[11]. The subject of the object clause, “medical instruments”, is plural, so the auxiliary verb should also be in the plural form ^[11]. So, replace “was” with “were” ^[11].

Sentence 3: I felt so closely to him ^[3].

The adjective “close” is used here as an epithet for “felt” ^[11]. Therefore, replace “closely” with “close” ^[11].

Sentence 4: However, after I went to high school, somehow I become distant from him ^[3].

The subject tense of this sentence is the general past tense, so replace “become” with “became” ^[11].

Sentence 5: I was unwilling talk with him and often disobeyed his rule of not stay out with my friends too late ^[3].

“Be unwilling to do sth.” is a fixed match, meaning “unwilling to do something”, so add “to” before “talk” ^[11]. In addition, the preposition “of” should be followed by a verb as the object ^[11]. So, change “stay” to “staying” ^[11].

Sentence 6: The disagreement was too sharp that neither he nor I knew what to settle it ^[3].

“So... that...” is a fixed match, so change “too” to “so” ^[11]. Replace “what” with “how” according to the meaning of the sentence ^[11].

Sentence 7: One day, he talked with me or hoped to mend our relations ^[3].

The preceding and following sentences are in a parallel relationship, not a choice relationship, so replace “or” with “and” ^[11].

Sentence 8: With the efforts made by all sides, we began to understand each other better ^[3].

This sentence shows that due to the efforts of both of us (“me” and “dad”), “we” are beginning to get to know each other better, so replace “all” with “both” ^[11].

The cases listed above show that reading not only helps to understand the surface meaning of words, but uses appropriate strategies for critical thinking, and understanding the English text at a deeper level. To analyze language errors and provide effective solutions would be an effective way to improve writing ^[10]. Therefore, in second language learning, it is important to practise the use of grammar, expressions and thinking skills in reading and writing. Thus, reading and writing play a critical role in second language acquisition.

4. Conclusion

This thesis is an analysis of the importance of reading and writing in learning English as a second language. Firstly, reading and writing provide learners with more opportunities to practice and improve their grammar and vocabulary. When reading, learners can encounter a variety of sentence structures and new words, which they can then use in their own writing. Similarly, writing allows learners to practice using grammar and vocabulary, which can improve their understanding of the English language. Secondly, reading and writing should be given priority in the areas of depth of understanding, practicability, and accuracy of expression, especially when learners need relevant training. Furthermore, although this thesis shows only a very limited aspect of English reading and writing and lacks more accurate data testing, it sets out relevant and practical models and frameworks, as well as examples. A voluntary understanding by learners of the importance and awareness of reading and writing would also

be helpful in carrying out exercises. It is hoped that this thesis will be helpful for learners to improve their English as a second language.

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