Research on Satire Writing Techniques: Taking a Modest Proposal as an Example

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the integration of technology into classroom teaching has attracted much attention. The use of the Internet broke down many educational barriers and created a student-centered classroom. The present study evaluated the effects of using four technology-based learning tools, namely the Concept map, Open-ended questions, Quizzes, and the Collaborate board, for EFL writing in the context of Chinese secondary schools. The tools were designed and used for teaching and learning satirical writing techniques. As the results indicated, the four learning tools have had positive impacts on secondary students' EFL writing achievements. The findings are initially anticipated to provide insights for innovative designs of EFL writing teaching paradigms in the chosen context. Also, the study is expected to make contributions to applying technology-based EFL writing pedagogies in classroom teaching practices.

Keywords: *Writing Techniques, Teaching Design, Concept Map, Open-ended Questions, Quiz, Collaborate board, Innovation, Application Value.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, students at the secondary educational level learn English as a foreign language (EFL). However, acquiring English language writing skills is challenging and requires intensive instructions and practice [1]. Despite students are expected to have an equal command of all language skills, writing has a rather limited portion in high school EFL classes [2]. Traditional EFL writing classes consist of input, output, and feedback stages. However, the process usually has low effectiveness. Firstly, the input stage is usually considered as lacking of a mechanism, which makes it hard for language teachers to know exactly how each student masters learning. Secondly, the preheating stage before output is often considered as needing for a process in which students can conduct self-explorations of the extended content of the theme. Also, the feedback stage seems to be less significant as compared to other stages. The EFL classrooms often have only one teacher assessing student works or providing feedback to students, which may lead to subjective assessments. This would limit students' self-improvement. A considerable number of secondary students yield the lowest score in the writing portion of the English test in the Chinese Gaokao. Many factors contribute to this unique phenomenon such as the large class size, insufficient writing practices, delayed learning feedback, and uneven writing proficiency of language teachers [3]. These factors hinder the development of the EFL writing skills of Chinese secondary school students.

Information technologies have been blended with traditional teaching methods and approaches [4]. There is a growth of technology and internet-based writing practices [5]. Technology-based teaching strategies and instructions have been found effective in improving writing skills [6], such as assisting in error analyses and synchronizing students with feedback and evaluations [7]. However, it remains unclear whether technology-based learning tools have positive effects in EFL writing practices at Chinese secondary schools, since studies on EFL writing at the secondary educational level are scanty (Xuan, W. W., 2018). To fill this gap, four technological tools were used for secondary-school EFL writing in this study as intervention tools: (1) the Collaborate Board (CB); (2) Quizzes; (3) Open-ended questions; and (4) the Concept Map (CM). This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of four tools, including Concept Map, quizzes, open-ended questions, and Collaborate Board,

on EFL writing in the context of Chinese secondary education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept Map

The concept map (CM), rooted in Ausubel's constructivist theory of meaning [8] is a teaching technique developed by Novak [9] The CM visually represents concepts as nodes [10] It also showcases meaningful relationships between the concepts using links in a well-organized way [11]. As an effective graphic teaching and learning tool [12], CMs incorporate hierarchical structures, cross links, and particular examples [13] (as shown in Figure 1). These features of CMs allow students to get away from rote learning and acquire true comprehension towards knowledge and its intertwined relations [14]. Students can thus memorize and collate knowledge by organizing ideas and analyzing what is acquired [15].
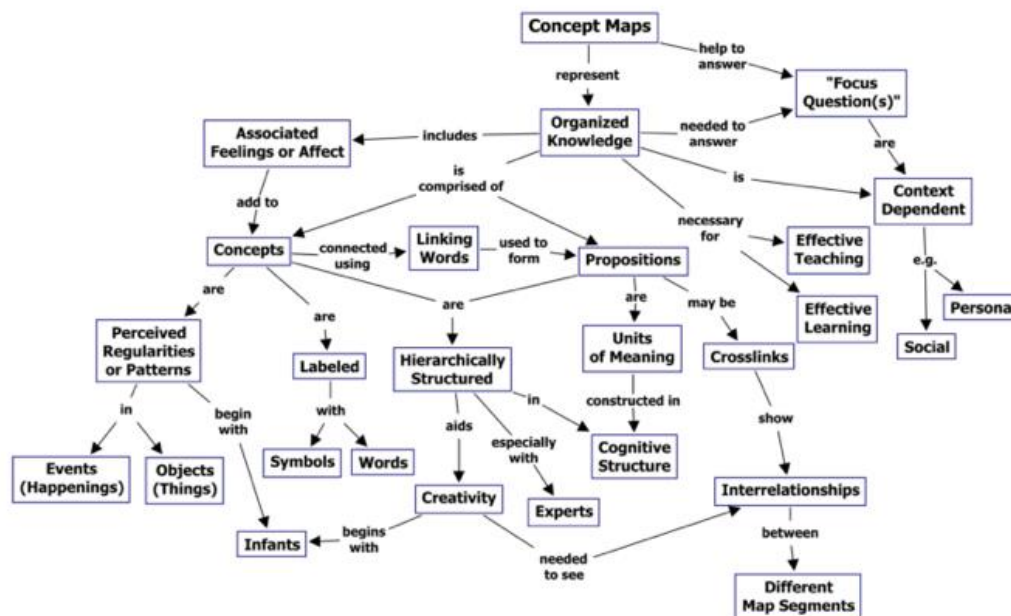

Figure 1. A concept map showing the key features of concept maps [11].

CMs are useful assessment tools for measuring students' writing [16]. As a powerful pedagogical tool and assessment device, a wealth of investigations has been conducted on investigating CM effects on EFL practices, such as writing skills [17]. Some previous evidences have reported positive results [18]. For example, students facilitated EFL writing abilities such as generating, arranging, and linking thoughts using CMs. They also developed accuracy, fluency, complexity of EFL writing [19]. Another case showed CMs optimized EFL writing processes regarding the organization and flow of ideas [20]. However, most studies adopted CMs as a pre-writing planning tool with no practical writing contents involved. Additionally, considering numerous Chinese secondary students produce unequal EFL writing outcomes [21] few evaluated the CM effectiveness on EFL writing in Chinese secondary educational settings. When selecting the types of graphic organizers, specific learning tasks, practical uses, and teaching purposes should be considered [22]. The CM was chosen as the target EFL writing tool since it delivers contents efficiently, provides comprehensible outlines, visualizes interrelations of concepts, and assesses students' thoughts [23].

2.2 Open-ended Questions

The technique of how to ask effective questions plays an important role in conducting empirical EFL studies. When formulating questions, words or instructions should deliver meanings clearly so that respondents can understand what is expected [24]. Typically, "Wh" questions such as what, who, and where, are considered as open-ended questions. Such questions seek for further information from respondents. Well-formulated open-ended questions should have the following features: (1) the interrogative in an open-ended question should match respondent' knowledge and thought levels; (2) the incorrect grammatical agreement, including semantic problems, contradictions, and clumsy sentence formulation, should be eliminated, when designing open-ended questions; (3) questioners should not make statements when asking questions because respondents usually expect questions; (4) open-ended questions should be removed, if they repeat themselves using different words and the instructions have no answers since such open-ended questions are misleading for respondents when they intend to respond but might fail to do so; (5) parentheses should not be used in open-

ended questions because they may be confusing for respondents and thus wonder what the contents and purposes of the parentheses could be; and (6) open-ended questions must have instructions or guidance for respondents so that they know how to answer the questions by providing definitions, explanations, or exemplifications.

2.3 Quizzes

As a powerful tool for instruction, quizzes, or assessments, evaluate students' writing achievements and give feedback for classroom practices [25] Such tools elicit evidence of student achievement and can prompt feedback that facilitates learning if used properly [26]. Quizzes assess learners' mastery and level of knowledge. Quizzes are designed to track, report, and evaluate learning progresses and results. Quizzes can be used as a self-assessment tool that can provide learners with more opportunities to understand the strengths and weakness of their learning. In a traditional EFL classroom, a limited number of the students can answer teachers' questions due to the large number of students and limited number of teachers in class. Most students do not have the opportunity for trial and error. Naturally, they cannot get the right answers. Also, quizzes can be motivating. Learners can stay focused and keep moving forward. Teachers can challenge students' perceptions and pique their interests by asking questions if they get wrong answers. Students would thus have opportunities to answer questions and receive an assessment in the technology-based classroom. They will be motivated to perform better because of peer competitions and performance mentality.

2.4 Collaborate Board

The Collaborate Board (CB), is a digital platform featuring ubiquity, easiness, and accessibility [27], supports the writing process [28]. The CB delivers instructions that ensure learners to access a more flexible and equal participation in the learning process [29]. Traditional instructions confine student participation in classroom settings [30]. However, the CB circulates participation among all students in a monitored, directed, and controlled way. In this case, students are allowed to add texts and photos to a shared class board, an interactive discussion board, using CB. As an effective method, students are encouraged to talk in class, brainstorm, or check in on how they are doing. Students' answers are collected using the CB. Analyzing their answers helps teachers understand students' ideas and know students' mastery of knowledge. CB not only is able to stimulate the students' ability to think independently, but also tp develop their ability to collaborate with peers.

3. METHODS

The present study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of four tools, including Concept Map, quizzes, open-ended questions, and Collaborate Board, on EFL writing in the context of Chinese secondary education. This study focused on the theme of "satirical writing technique", and make an in-depth analysis on how to combine traditional classroom strategies with newer technologies. The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of technological tools such as high cognitive level tools, formative assessment and the design of classroom activities on students' mastery and proficiency of satirical writing techniques. The ultimate goal was to apply this writing teaching method to the actual classroom.

This study was tailored for senior students in high school to explore how effective the technology curriculum we designed was in helping students to use satire in their own writing. It has always been a difficult task in the field of English education to teach students to use rhetorical devices to perfect their own writing. In traditional classrooms, teachers can usually only able to improve students understanding by explaining the concept of rhetorical devices, relevant example sentences, and thus leading them to analyse model texts from books with extremely limited information and texts. Therefore, it calls for the field of English education to explore whether the designed technology-based course was productive in helping students to understand the satire better and be able to apply it in their writing proess.

3.1 Research Instruments

3.1.1 Technology-based Concept Maps

Novak introduced the idea map as a teaching aid, according to the meaningful theory of learning. Nowak believes that a concept map is a tool to manage and convey knowledge, and a tool that has extensive teaching possibilities for curriculum and educational design. A concept map can help students construct a clear network of knowledge, comprehend the whole structure of knowledge, promote intuitive thinking and improve transfer and absorption of knowledge. It is a mighty cognitive instrument as well. The relevance of concept maps according to research is supported by modern cognitive learning theory and constructivist learning theory. Concept mapping is also a metacognitive approach that can help students enhance their reflective cognition and learn to "learn."

Integrating digital technologies helps students and teachers create, modify, and arrange CMs regarding organizing knowledge [31]. Teaching and learning contents thus become richer and more dynamic and are situated in better learning contexts. CMs based on digital technologies have enhanced students' participation in constructing knowledge [31] and brought about more

changing and interactive learning performances. Meanwhile, they have developed the level of cognitive thinking.

3.1.2 The Intervention: A Modest Proposal

The phrase "A Modest Proposal'" is now widely employed in English writing as a reference to this direct sarcastic approach. In this study, we designed a modest proposal including the following components to improve students' satire writing.

3.1.2.1 Concept Map

In the intervention, which is satirical writing skill class, in order to make students understand satirical technique more deeply, a group activity to construct concept map was designed. The teacher will provide instructions and an incomplete concept map (as shown in Figures 2 and 3) to students. In the incomplete concept map, each subtitle will be linked to another webpage, which may be presented in the form of video, chart, paper, etc. The purpose is to let students try to understand deeply and establish the connection of concepts in subprojects according to clear instructions and accurate reading materials. By using technology-based concept map, students can perfectly transform their mastered knowledge into their own knowledge, and constantly reflect on it in the process.

Concept Map Instructions: Satire

Satire is a literary device for the artful ridicule of a folly or vice as a means of exposing or correcting it. The subject of satire is generally human frailty, as it manifests in people's behavior or ideas as well as societal institutions or other creations. Satire utilizes tones of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation towards a flawed subject with the hope of creating awareness and subsequent change. You and your group members are arranged to make a completed concept map. The content is about the influencing factors in satire writing.

Figure 2. The instruction of concept map

Figure 3. Incomplete concept map

3.1.2.2 Open-ended Question

We incorporated some open-ended questions in the course design in order to get better results in assessing the learning of students. We used open questions four times in our lesson.

After students learned about examples from the website we gave about satire in their lives, we asked them an open question to quickly analyze satire in a literature piece they enjoy, on the basis of the facts they collect. Thus, in the major portion of the course, in the form of open-ended questions, we developed a tough group activity requiring students to get a better knowledge of the satire via the comparison and analysis of the difference between two satirical works, according to the rules. Next, in a third open-ended inquiry, we questioned students about their understanding of a modest proposal to encourage them to consider summing up the theme notion and naturally integrate it with the funny approach. In order to encourage students to examine how they can use satire in their own work, the last open-ended question we wanted was less limited and more wide-ended, more like a questionnaire, and we hope that students might reflect more closely in that session.

3.1.2.3 Quiz

In the satire writing class we set two questions: one was to examine the basic knowledge of the students of the three principal satire styles, once they learned the fundamentals of satire, and the other one was to question students, who used Jonathan Swift satire technique in this essay after learning the thematic idea and writing style of a modest proposal.

3.1.2.4 Collaborate Board

Using the Collaborating Board, an interactive discussion board, students may submit text and images to the classroom board. It is a great way to get children to speak, think, or evaluate how they do. We can rapidly collect replies from students by using a collaborating board in our NearPod session. Teachers can master the understanding and absorption of knowledge of pupils by examining these replies. In addition to stimulating students' individual thinking capacities, the collaborating board also enhances their capacity to work together.

3.1.3 Research Protocol

Satire can be used in the writing process to euphemistically express one's own ideas, show the theme more deeply, and deepen the impression of readers. We hope that through systematic teaching, grade 12 students will understand and master the use of satire, which will help them in their future writing career. Thus, we recuirted 80 students in grade 12 in a local high school in Suzhou China to participate in our intervention study. 40 students were randomly selected and placed in the experienmt group and 40 was placed in the control group. Before the intervention was conducted, a pre- test was

conducted to understand students' writing skills before they learned sarcasm in our intervention.

In our lesson, we firstly introduce what is Satire and a video introduction was given. Then we set a collaborate board which gives students chance to express their thinking and interact with the teacher. Students then need to establish a concept map in their group. After completing the concept map, the understanding of satire should be quite thorough, and students should proceed to take a quiz to review what they learned. Afterwards, we will give students the URL or information to introduce the application of Satire in all aspects. After reading the website, students should give an example of the use of satire in any literature work they like and also give the analysis of the work by using open-ended question. Students are required to complete a group work by reading a passage and analysis the writing techniques and finally finish a quiz. Furthermore, we will summary the main idea of the article and how to use satirical writing techniques in our own writing. A post-test was conducted once the lesson was complete to assess students' mastery of satire writing based on their writing scores.

At the end of this lesson, students should be able to exemplify the main characteristics of Satire writing skills. They should be able to understand the content of A Modest Proposal and how Jonathan used satire in his work after the intervention. Furthermore, they should be able to establish a concept map to analyze the influencing factors in satire writing and then grasp the general idea of the article and analyse the application of Satire in the article. At last, theyshould be able to apply satirical writing techniques to their own writing.

3.1.4 Evaluation

To evaluate the effectiveness and quality of the programme we designed, we used an intervention study approach to create a quantifiable rating scale for the use of irony, collecting samples of students' writing before and after class, scoring them, and then comparing and analyzing changes in students' writing levels before and after the programme (see Appendix A). This section will focus on our principles of the rating scale and the data collected.

Unlike the science and engineering disciplines, experiments using intervention research methods can be designed with standard experimental and control groups and, in addition to this, quantitative criteria for measuring each group are much easier to develop. Based on our survey of previous literature collection, the criteria for developing rating scales in comparative trials in the humanities, particularly for studies of writing practices and student writing samples, are numerous and not easily standardized.

Therefore, the criteria for evaluating the samples were developed by combining the scale applied in

previous studies on the rhetorical aspects of language in writing with the content and themes of the student writing samples and the use of irony techniques. On the one hand, we set criteria to consider in terms of the content and subject matter of the students' pre and post writing samples. The content of the students' writing should be based on what they have seen and heard in their lives, and the general direction should be in line with the human condition, and the theme should reflect social issues as deeply as possible, rather than making up a ridiculous story for satirical effect.

Also, an excellent piece of satire is often not built up by a single rhetorical device; the writer often needs to use more elements and methods to support the main point of satire, and if the student can use his or her own writing skills, such as prose, simile and metaphor, to enhance the satirical effect from the side, then his or her work will be seen as even better.

On the other hand, the level of skill with which students use satire is an important criterion for us to consider. The use of irony in writing is not just about the contrast created by the storyline, the counter-use of words and phrases and the unilateral highlighting of writing features. To perfect a masterpiece, students often need to incorporate their own profound thinking and analysis to create a vivid character image and a lively storyline from multiple dimensions, which means that we need to feel in the text that students are clear about the methods they have used to achieve This means that we need to feel in the text that students are clear about the methods they have used to achieve their aims and the reasons for doing so.

4. RESULTS

We gave each of the two specific scales a score of five points, and after the scores were awarded, the average score was taken as the student's total score. A total of ten samples were collected and divided into two groups (pre-lesson group and post-school group) from five students at the upper, middle and lower levels of writing in this grade, and numbered A-E in descending order of writing level, according to the data, the scores of the pre-lesson group A-E were 4.5, 3.9, 3.5, 2.9 and 2.5 respectively; while the scores of the post-school group A-E were 4.4, 4.0, 3.7 and 3.0 respectively. 3.7, 3.4, 3.1. Overall, it appears that there was a trend of improvement in all groups, but students who originally scored lower on the writing scale improved their scores more and the effect of the course was more pronounced.

In order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the course as derived from our comparative before-and-after sample analysis, in this section we will use the more improved student writing samples as examples.

Due to the repeated emphasis on rhetorical devices in our course and the rigid requirements in the mark

scheme, students (especially those who originally scored lower) worked hard on the difficult task of using various rhetorical devices to achieve irony.

Below is an example of a sample of students who scored 2.5 before the lesson, in order to show that the student had learned to use allusion and action descriptions to satirize characters after in-class instruction.

Here is a sample of the student's pre-intervention writing (excerpt).

Mr. Smith came again swinging his big belly, he was known as a scoundrel within the village and it seemed that every derogatory word could be used to describe him, especially greed, rudeness and brutality. Every time he passed by the widow's grocery shop, he would give a rude and wicked grin to the woman behind the counter and take a few pieces of bread with a smiling face.

As can be seen, this excerpt from the student is a description of a landlord and scoundrel in the countryside, with the aim of satirizing his greed and lust. In his description, we can see that he uses a few descriptions of appearance and expressions, but otherwise he expresses his satire in a simple narrative manner, without any obvious irony. After studying the example of a modest proposal explained in class and some technical knowledge, some improvement is evident in the following sample of students' post-lesson writing.

Here is a sample of the student's after-intervention writing (excerpt).

At the sound of the pair of crutches tapping on the floor, the lady of the grocery shop looked up and sighed softly, and, obviously, she knew that the demon had come again. He slipped on a pair of broken shoes, giggled, blew his nose from time to time, wiped his face with his muddy cuffs, and walked to the door, where he stared lustfully at the mistress, picked up a few pieces of bread with his dirty hands, and teased her a few times before leaving, lest she forget that she was a widow.

The analysis of the sample comparing the two before-and-after writing shows that after our classroom education, the students were more conscious of trying to combine a variety of descriptions in their writing and were more proactive in thinking about how to sketch the characters they wanted to satirize without realizing it, which was particularly evident in the less well-grounded students.

In addition to more effective use of rhetorical devices, we also found from the before and after samples collected for the course that students made significant progress in their use of reflexive language. In all ten samples, similar to the results of the textual analysis of rhetorical devices, students with lower scores showed more significant

improvement, and here we will take the sample of students with an original score of 2.9 as an example to show their progress in this area.

Here is a sample of the student's pre-intervention writing (excerpt).

They crossed the bay in their boats, brutally killing Irish lives with swords in their hands, plundering villages along the way on their warhorses, spilling oil on the torches they held with red eyes and shouting as they threw them across villages and fields. They gulped down strong drink and talked rudely of treasure, slaves and women in the night around lonely campfires.

As we can see in this student's previous writing sample, his narrative is mainly about the atrocities committed by the British invaders on Irish soil, and he uses simple descriptions between the lines to set up the brutality and greed and madness of the invaders through some action descriptions. Objectively speaking, the text is very good in its use of continuous action to create a complete picture of the characters, although it cannot be said to be a very satirical text in terms of its irony.

Here is a sample of the student's after-intervention writing (excerpt).

They came laughing, with high hats, dusty saddles under their feet, and waving flaming sticks in their hands as if they were carrying a sacred fire taken from Mount Olympus, and if they could, I guess they would have pinned an olive branch to their waists and preached with reckless abandon their mouths full of benevolence and freedom and democracy. As the horses' hooves drew nearer, they smiled and visited each house, raising all the money they could in cordial conversation with the people, talking of helping them to achieve a better life.

After comparing the before and after texts, it is not difficult to see that this student has gradually mastered the ability to use antithesis and contrast to highlight the qualities of the object of description from the opposite side, from the original level of using mere action descriptions to portray characters. This was demonstrated in the text analysis of a modest proposal in our lesson.

5. CONCLUSION

The literature generally demonstrated that it is difficult to teach students to apply rhetorical devices in writing in a quality way, and the solution to this problem is elusive. Therefore, our research was based on the idea that teaching students to use rhetorical devices could be made more interesting and diverse by creating a new type of classroom that combines technology and content, and testing the effectiveness of the experiment in a pre and

post-controlled way. Based on the positive results of this study, it is clear that the use of blogs, coggle and nearpod as additional teaching tools in the rhetorical writing classroom has made the classroom richer and more diverse for the students, and that the new classroom format has improved for the students, especially the weaker ones, when compared to the before and after writing samples. This experiment was only a rudimentary attempt, and we believe that we will make further progress in this area in the future.

Appendix A

Ruburic

Writing Rubric						
Criteria	**Exceeds expectations**	**Meets expectations**	**Approaching expectations**	**Does not meet expectations**	**Weight**	**Total**
	5	**4**	**3**	**0-2**	**1**	
Content and Theme	All of the ideas and descriptions in the essay are true to life, with thoughtful and multi-dimensional irony about the subject, and a variety of rhetorical devices are used to accompany the irony in the statements.	Most of the ideas and descriptions in the essay are true to life, with thoughtful and multi-dimensional irony about the subject, and a variety of rhetorical devices are used to accompany the irony in the statements.	Some ideas and descriptions in the essay are true to life, with thoughtful and multi-dimensional irony about the subject, and some rhetorical devices are used to accompany the irony in the statements.	No idea and description in the essay is true to life, with thoughtful and multi-dimensional irony about the subject, and no other rhetorical devices is used to accompany the irony in the statements.		
	5	**4**	**3**	**0-2**	**1**	
Application of Satire Skill	Writing demonstrates deep synthesis and analysis of the satire writing of the tasks described in the lesson and model essay. Careful attention and thinking about essentiality/affordances of satire.	Writing demonstrates adequate synthesis and analysis of the satire writing of the tasks described in the lesson and model essay. Careful attention and thinking about essentiality/affordances of satire.	Writing demonstrates limited synthesis and analysis of the satire writing of the tasks described in the lesson and model essay. Careful attention and thinking about essentiality/affordances of satire.	Writing lacks synthesis and analysis of the satire writing of the tasks described in the lesson and model essay. Careful attention and thinking about essentiality/affordances of satire.		
				TOTAL		**/40**
				Grade calculations: Total/8 = __ /5		

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